

**EQUALITY IN TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOR MALE OFFENDERS WHO  
HAVE BEEN CLASSIFIED WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES**

A Record of Study

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

All independent school districts are required by law to provide educational services for the students classified as Developmentally Delayed Delinquents (DDD); this record of study focuses on the students classified as DDD in one ISD, Main, which is a pseudonym. Under federal and state laws, the students classified as DDD are entitled to a free and appropriate educational experience just like their nondisabled peers. However, in Main ISD's 2008- 2009 school year, a problem arose with DDD placement in the general educational setting. During this time ninety students classified as DDD were either segregated to the alternative campus or to the MSSLC campus through an administrative decision by the former MISD superintendent.

The new MISD superintendent is taking steps to correct this violation of special education law by placing a larger portion of DDD students back into their appropriate educational settings. However, given the recent disruptions in the program caused by the former superintendent, the researcher is trying to understand the quality of the current programming. Therefore, the research focus was: What are the perceptions of the professional staff (teachers, counselors, school leaders, and other professional staff) as to the nature and quality of the educational experiences provided by the high school and the alternative school for their DDD students?

Findings from the research produced three overarching themes. The first theme, program culture, refers to the direction, purpose, and passion the school district has for enhancing programs for the students classified as DDD. The second theme, staffing,

refers to programs and services set up to accept and educate the “normal” students, which can cause a disconnect or deficit view of thinking for students with disabilities. The last theme is curriculum and instruction, which indicates the ability of the high school and the developmental center to provide quality instruction.

Finally, individual perceptions can dictate many aspects of human nature including but not limited to our attitudes, outlook, and our drive to enforce change, or our willingness to settle or accept the status quo. Ultimately, Main ISD’s educational leaders need to become more cognizant about what it truly means to be culturally proficient and to more closely focus on and understand the students that walk through the school’s doors every morning. Policies, practices, and procedures must reflect this internal understanding and culture for proficiency in educating each and every student.

## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this work to my beautiful wife and children.

Laci, I want to thank you for the support you have given me over the last fifteen years, especially for the last five while I have been working on my doctoral degree. You have always supported me in what I wanted to accomplish and backed me one hundred percent. I also want to thank you for loving me. I truly could not imagine going through life without you, babe. I love you more than anything in this world. You are truly my rock in life and I owe you more than you will ever know. You are the love of my life and I have loved every minute of it. To Hunter, Gracyn, and Hagan: Hunter, you are the light of my eyes. I am so proud of you, son. You have your mother's heart and you seem to always want to make us happy. I could not ask for anything more. Gracyn, WOW, you are so much like your father. Into everything, Miss personality, hard headed, and did I mention cute? You are truly going to be an adventure. I love you, girl. Hagan, I cannot wait to see you grow and become a part of this family. I love you, little man.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have remained faithful”  
(2 Timothy 4:7).

Before joining the doctoral program in the summer of 2008, I looked at current issues in education in a shallow manner. I want to acknowledge that the doctoral education I’ve received at Texas A&M University has taught me to look at things much more deeply and has opened my eyes to the many inequities that still permeate society today.

Dr. Scheurich, I want to thank you for helping me get through this daunting process. You were always there to answer questions, provide advice, and to question me, which during the process seemed tough but is a vital part of the learning process. I truly appreciate your passion for wanting a better world for all and also that you encourage people not to settle for the status quo. I think that is a rare quality today. We need more people like you in the educational world to ensure all of our kids become successful.

Dr. Webb-Hasan, I want to thank you for making me look at issues and situations within and outside of education through different lenses. I see and hear so many things that previously I did not hear or see because of, basically, ignorance. There are so many things that still need to be changed to accomplish the “dream.” I thoroughly enjoyed your perspectives and what you brought to the table. You demand excellence in education for all and will not settle for anything less, which is awesome.

Dr. McCormick, I have not known you for very long nor have I had you for a class. However, from the first day you were on my committee, you have been very supportive and encouraging, which I appreciate so much. There were several times throughout this process that I just needed to hear something positive and you provided it. You truly have a caring heart for your students and I have thoroughly enjoyed working with you over the last year. Your words of support and encouragement meant more than you know.

Dr. McKenzie, what can I say? You are a “Fireball.” I truly mean that in an awesome way. I loved your classes. Even though we talked about some topics that still today are very hard to comprehend, you stretched our knowledge and constantly asked questions that *really* challenged our way of thinking. I will have to say you are one of the best teachers I have ever had throughout my educational career. You have challenged me in a way that makes me appreciate you. It is hard to explain, but you just have that *it* factor, which is admired by your students.

While interviewing future doctoral candidates, one asked, “What will we get from this program?” I took the question and answered, “This program will make you look at things differently and more critically. You will hear and see inequities that you have never seen or heard before. Most importantly, it will give you the knowledge and confidence you need to challenge these inequities within your work or even home environment around people you love.” Upon my response, Dr. Skrla said to the candidate: “You gave him structure, he gave you substance.” I acknowledge the roles

Texas A&M University and the faculty within the doctoral program played in helping me evolve into a more developed educator.

And finally, I must acknowledge my parents—without their love and support I would not be here. I do not believe a son could be any prouder of his parents than I am of mine. Both my mother and father have always been in my life to provide the guidance I needed throughout my thirty-four years. I am eternally grateful for their unwavering love and support. Mom, you have always supported me and been there for me. You pushed me to excel and expected my best, whatever that might be. I can still hear you say, “You can do anything you put your mind to, Dale.” So many times I did not truly understand or believe what you were saying, but now, as I have gotten older, I understand that you just wanted the best for me, and for that, I am grateful. You helped me realize the importance of a good education when you made me sit with you on the couch and read, and also when you made me walk back to the elementary school from the junior high to get my spelling book so I could work on my vocabulary words. Education has always been taken very seriously in the Lowry household and the expectation to excel in education has always been present. I could not ask for a better mom nor could I ask for a better “mammy” for my children. I love you, mom.

Dad, I attended a funeral the other day and the son of the deceased father said, “Thank you God for giving me my dad; he was my hero.” That statement echoes how I feel about you, dad. I cannot begin to explain what you have meant to me in my life or what you mean to me still. You have been my rock for so long, the person I call when something is wrong, the person I look to for advice, the person who, when there is

something wrong, I call to make things better. I stated the following to you in an email upon your retirement:

*Between you and me—Just want to let you know something, old man.*

*The thing that I am most PROUD of in life...is the fact that I get to call you “DAD” each day. One day at the house, you mentioned something about not being the man grandpa was during his lifetime. I disagree. You took what grandpa started and moved it forward several notches, which is what a son is supposed to do for his father. I cannot tell you how much you have influenced my life and I cannot imagine life without you.*

*LOVA YA, PAP*

My first year in college, I wrote a little paper entitled, “The Person I most Admire.” I believe you still have it hanging in your office. That paper was about grandpa.

However, I believe if grandpa were here today, he could not be prouder of a son, and as your son, DAD, I could not be prouder of a father.



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# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

### **Introduction**

Over the last fifteen years the Main State Supported Living Center (MSSLC) has become home to students classified as Developmentally Delayed Delinquent (DDD) who have intellectual disabilities. These young men reside at the MSSLC on a 24/7 basis. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and 19 Texas Administrative Code (TAC) 89.115, the local school district must provide these young men with a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). Currently, there are a total of sixty-eight students classified as DDD at either the development center or the high school. There are sixty-one students currently receiving services at the development center. Twenty-two are White, thirty-one are African American, and eight are Hispanic. They are all classified as special education students and they are all classified as economically disadvantaged. At the high school, there are seven students currently being served. Five are White, one is African American, and one is Hispanic. They also are all classified as both special education and economically disadvantaged students. The MSSLC and the Main Independent School District (MISD) have worked together for the last fifteen years to educate these young men without incident or harm to the current educational system.

However, at the beginning of the 2008 school year concerns were raised by the new MISD superintendent hired by the board of trustees. The new superintendent

expressed concerns for the danger presented by these students to the staff, students, and community of MISD. In 2008, due to an administrative decision by the new superintendent, seventy students, which grew to ninety students, were not being served in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) as mandated by IDEA and 19 TAC 89.115. These students were second generationally segregated to a District Alternative Education Placement (DAEP) site. As Mickelson (2001) indicates, “Second generation segregation involves the racially correlated allocation of educational opportunities within schools typically accomplished by tracking” (p. 216). Ethically and legally, this created a problem that needed to be examined to ensure the students classified as developmentally delayed delinquents, like any other student, were fully being awarded a FAPE as required by IDEA.

The problem arose when the former superintendent hired by Main ISD in 2007 interpreted and understood the Federal IDEA law and 19 TAC 89.1115 of Texas state law incorrectly. The former superintendent also misunderstood the Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) between the Texas Education Agency (TEA), the Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation (MHMR), and the local MOU between the MSSLC and the MISD differently than any of the three previous superintendents before him. The former MISD superintendent interpreted the laws and local agreements to say that the MSSLC was responsible for educating the students classified as DDD currently living at the MSSLC. He did not want the students classified as DDD educated in MISD classrooms. It was the MSSLC superintendent and the Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS) interpretation that the students

classified as DDD should be educated in the LRE continuum including regular classrooms, classrooms at the district alternative education setting, and classrooms on the MSSLC campus and that supervision should be provided by staff from the MISD. The MSSLC superintendent and DADS wanted the students classified as DDD educated according to their IEPs in their LRE, as written in IDEA. It was the interpretation of the former MISD superintendent that the LRE for the students classified as DDD was on the MSSLC campus, that none should be integrated into regular education classrooms on any MISD campus, and that MSSLC staff should provide the supervision.

Over the last half-century, several litigation battles took place that helped change the landscape of special education in school districts. These changes and new laws have brought about a more equitable environment for our cognitively delayed students. Several court cases have helped move the education of all students forward over the course of the last century. However, no one case shook the foundation of America more so than *Brown v. Topeka, Kansas, and Board of Education* in 1954. Even though this case did not directly impact students with disabilities, it started the ball rolling in the right direction forcing policy makers and practitioners to address the concern that education was intended for all American children, not just a select few. All three court cases discussed below are related in part to the legal issues concerning program and policy that transpired in Main, Texas between the MSSLC and the MISD.

*Brown v. Topeka, Kansas, Board of Education* in 1954 was decided in the United States Supreme Court. To many, this is the most significant education related case in our nation's history. Thurgood Marshall, who later became a Supreme Court Justice, led



a team of lawyers to address racial segregation in schools and other public facilities. This team of lawyers argued that discriminating against one based on his or her color violates the Fourteenth amendment to the U.S. constitution, which ensures that all citizens or students have equal protection and access under the law. The Supreme Court's response, *Brown v. Topeka, Kansas, Board of Education* in 1954, then, laid the foundation for protecting human rights against discriminatory acts against sex, disability, race, color, age, or national origin.

The issue with the second court case, *Honig v. Doe*, centers on whether or not a school district can indefinitely suspend a handicapped student pending completion of expulsionary proceedings. Doe and Smith, both emotionally disturbed students, were suspended indefinitely for disruptive behaviors related to their disabilities. They were to be suspended until district staff completed their expulsionary ruling. Claiming a violation of the Education of the Handicapped Act, Doe filed suit in the Federal District Court. He claimed he was entitled to a free and appropriate education while he was awaiting the decision regarding his expulsion from the school district. In response, the U.S. Supreme Court held that a student with disabilities might be suspended for a period of ten days. If a student is suspended for more than ten days, his or her due process rights under the Fourteenth Amendment start to be violated. A "stay put" clause is provided within the Education for the Handicapped Act (EHA) to allow students to stay in their current educational placement until a ruling can be rendered. In 1994 Congress modified the "stay put" clause when dealing with students who have disabilities if they

brought a firearm to school. Under these circumstances the students can be placed at an interim alternative education setting if the IEP team is in agreement for this placement.

A third court case, *Mill v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia*, involved seven school-aged children who were classified as being either mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed, or having behavior problems and who were being denied access to a free and appropriate educational experience. The District of Columbia government did not provide an education for these handicapped or exceptional children. The school system was reassigning, transferring, suspending, or expelling students so classified from the regular classroom without affording them their due process rights. On August 1, 1972, the District Court ruled in favor of the seven children. The judges concluded that these children must be provided the same educational experience and afforded their due process rights under the Fourteenth Amendment.

These three court cases are all related to the legal issue regarding program and policy that transpired in Main, Texas. The MISD for the calendar school year 2008-2009 segregated all ninety students classified as DDD from the MSSLC campus onto the DAEP campus or into classrooms on the MSSLC campus. In looking at IDEA and FAPE, this administrative decision in 2008 went against the policies that govern the public educational system for four reasons: (1.) Not one of the ninety students from the MSSLC was integrated into a regular classroom with non-disabled students, (2.) no student from the MSSLC was allowed to participate in any UIL extra-curricular activity, (3.) no student from the MSSLC was involved in a vocational education or work skills

development class, and (4.) students from the MSSLC were not being provided with the appropriate or even basic educational materials i.e. textbooks, workbooks, and the like required by FAPE.

According to Walsh, Kemerer, and Maniotis (2005), “Special education is governed by federal law more than any other aspect of school law. The notion that education is a matter to be left to the sound discretion of the states and local communities went out the window in 1975 when P.L. 94-142 was passed” (p. 97). In the United States, approximately seven percent of all public school students have been identified as having disabilities such as cognitive delays, emotional disturbances, and learning disabilities, according to Leone, Zaremba, and Chapin (1995). This means that school districts, more so than ever, must follow federal and state laws when it comes to special education. Although this is a daunting task at times, it does help ensure a higher quality of education for all students. Walter, Kemerer, and Maniotis (2005) report, “Congress responded to several court cases in the late 1960s and early 1970s asserting that children with disabilities were being denied an equal opportunity to public education (p. 97).

However, at the end of the 1970s it was determined by Congress that America was not serving approximately eight million of its students in an appropriate manner. So, the Federal government appropriated additional funds to help the states and public schools address the needs of these students. Along with these funds came recommendations for policies and practices to be used by the states and their local public school districts. Still, of the forty percent increase in funds that were supposed to be

allocated to the states to help rectify this problem, not even half of that original estimate has been sent to the states. As Walsh, Kemerer, and Maniotis (2005) state, “Congress has never appropriated even half of that forty percent figure” (p. 98). This presents a problem for the school districts in educating these students who often times need additional supplies or educational resources. For example, one of the requirements school districts are mandated to accomplish is to find and locate all students who might have a disability. Walsh, Kemerer, and Maniotis (2005) state:

‘Child find’ is the label attached to the requirement that school districts take an active approach toward identifying and serving students in need. Schools are not permitted to sit back and wait for parents to ask for services. The law does not require billboards, but it does require school districts to publicize the availability of special education services. (p. 98-99).

Many students who qualify for special education have either a Learning Disability (LD) or an Emotionally Disturbance (ED) classification. Other physical and mental impairments such as cognitive delays, hearing impairment, speech, language impaired, visually impaired, autistic, traumatic brain injured, and other health impaired (OHI) can be provided services under the special education (SPED) umbrella. A Full Individual Evaluation (FIE) must be conducted before a student can be placed into SPED. Once in SPED, an FIE must be conducted every three years. Once the evaluation process has been completed and the mental or physical disability has been determined, both student and parents will take part in an Admission, Review, and

Dismissal (ARD) meeting to determine qualifications, the best services, and the most appropriate individual education plan for each student.

The ARD committee must develop the IEP, place the student, make decisions about disciplinary matters, and decide on evaluation activities, according to Walsh, Kemerer, and Maniotis (2005). Once the student has been placed into SPED, each student will have an annual ARD to discuss services and look at needed modifications. Any recommendations for changes to the IEP can come from a student's current teachers, counselor, assistant principal, or parent. Any further evaluations of the student must be considered and agreed upon by the entire committee. The goal of the ARD committee and SPED, therefore, is to ensure students classified as SPED are being educated in the LRE and according to their IEP. This process and goal oriented policy helps ensure students are being educated according to IDEA. However, ARD decisions do not always ensure these students are successful in education and many SPED students become viewed as disciplinary problems, which eventually leads to drop out and finally incarceration.

In America, youth who have either a learning disability or who have an emotional disturbance are arrested at much higher rates than their non-disabled peers (Burrell & Warboys, 2000). Agencies working with the disabled, especially school age children, should first seek to understand their disability. Burrell and Warboys (2000) state, "Information about the disability often helps to explain behavior in a way that facilitates constructive intervention, and it is essential to arriving at a disposition that will both meet the youth's rehabilitative needs and comply with IDEA requirements" (p.

3). The MSSLC seems to possess a solid understanding for the students classified as DDD, their disabilities, and the ways to best accommodate their needs. Even though these students have disabilities and have a background with the justice system, they are still entitled by IDEA to a FAPE. Burrell and Warboys (2000) state: “Every youth with a disability, as defined by IDEA, is entitled to a free appropriate public education FAPE” (p. 4). MISD in conjunction with MSSLC must have an IEP in place for each of these ninety students classified as DDD at the beginning of each school year. The MSSLC has been training district staff at MISD to understand, plan, evaluate, and ultimately work with these students since 1994 in order to provide the ninety students classified as DDD with a FAPE in their LRE. Also, providing a sound education will help eliminate the potential of disruptive behavior by these students. As Burrell and Warboys suggest, “Helping youth to reach their educational potential by protecting their rights under IDEA can give them the tools they need to succeed in life” (p. 3). Therefore, affording disabled students with the opportunity to receive a FAPE will help reduce the potential risks of falling into the judicial system for these young students. In addition, by ensuring related services are provided for the identified disabilities for the students classified as DDD, IDEA will be a significant factor in reducing delinquency. Burrell and Warboys (2000) assert: “Education may be the single most important service the juvenile justice system can offer young offenders in its effort to rehabilitate them and equip them for success” (p. 11).

In response, then, to the recent history that MISD has with the students classified as DDD, this study will analyze the perceptions of school leaders, teachers, and other

district staff who directly work with the students classified as DDD to gauge their perceptions on the educational experiences and programs provided by the MISD for the students classified as DDD. Furthermore, an exhaustive literature review will be provided to enhance the study; the study's methodology and methods will be described thoroughly so the readers understand each step of the study; and finally all findings and conclusions will be stated with the intent to make future recommendations to help the MISD staff better serve all their students classified as DDD.

### **Problem Statement**

The MISD by law is required to provide educational services for the students classified as DDD. During the 81<sup>st</sup> Texas legislative session in 2009, additional funding was written into SB 643, which provides an additional \$5000 for each student plus their additional weighted funding in Tier 1(basic allotment & SPED) for the district to use in educating these students. In 2008 and 2009, there was a problem with their placement into the general educational setting. During this time, all ninety students classified as DDD were either segregated to the alternative campus or placed back in classrooms on the MSSLC campus by an administrative decision handed down by the former MISD superintendent, even though the ARD committee approved no change of placements.

The current MISD superintendent is trying to correct this violation of special education law by placing a larger portion of the students classified as DDD back into the appropriate placements according to their IEPs. Nevertheless, this process will take time and programs need to be analyzed to determine their impact. Therefore, this study will analyze the perceptions of those staff members within the MISD, who work directly with

the students classified as DDD, in relation to their perceptions about the educational programs and experiences offered to their students classified as DDD.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Under federal and state laws, the students classified as DDD are entitled to free and appropriate educational experience just like their nondisabled peers. This includes instructional services, environments, and opportunities. Most of the students classified as DDD, from 2008-2010, were educated in classrooms on the DAEP campus, which is a more restrictive environment. Currently, under the leadership of the current superintendent, a larger portion of the students classified as DDD are being integrated back onto the high school campus. However, given the recent disruptions in the program caused by the former superintendent, the researcher is trying to understand the quality of the current programming in place for the students classified as DDD.

Therefore, the research focus is: What are the perceptions of the professional staff (teachers, counselors, school leaders, and other professional staff) as to the nature and quality of the educational experiences provided by the high school and the alternative school for their DDD students? Ultimately, it is the intent of this study to help ensure the educational programs in place for the students classified as DDD are both equitable and challenging.

### **Significance of the Study**

Over the last fifteen years, the MSSLC has served students classified as DDD who have moderate to severe mental and emotional disabilities. These young men reside at the MSSLC on a permanent basis. According to the Individuals with Disabilities



Education Act (IDEA) and 19 TAC 89.115, the local school district must provide these young men with a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) state that, conducting equity audits when trying to eliminate racial erasure by educational staff helps ensure students are receiving an adequate and equitable education. Since the passage of SB 643, Main ISD will need to thoroughly analyze and evaluate its special programs for the students classified as DDD since the numbers are sure to increase considerably. By analyzing MISD staff members' perspectives, who directly work with these students, this research can help ensure programs in place are adequately serving these students classified as DDD.

### **Overview of Methodology**

Lather (2007) describes one methodology of qualitative research as participant observation. Merriam (1991) adds: "Unlike the natural scientist's view of research, which stresses objectivity and distance from what is being studied, qualitative research cannot get 'outside' the phenomenon. In fact, the researcher is typically closely involved with who is being researched" (p. 49). As stated above, to truly know and understand the perceptions of the MISD staff members, the researcher must work closely with the staff on a frequent basis. Observations and interviews will be conducted at the MISD high school and alternative campus. The intention is to truly understand their experiences and perceptions for given situations through close proximity and observation.

Merriam (1991) most clearly defines the methods of qualitative research by explaining that "the major data strategies of this type of research include interviewing, observing, and analyzing documents" (p. 49). MISD school leaders, teachers, and other

district staff members who can add clarity to this study will be observed and interviewed to gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives on the educational programs and services that are being provided for the students classified as DDD. Documents will also be collected from the staff in the form of departmental meeting notes, professional development training reflections, and sign-in sheets from various staff meetings. The additional funds generated by the students classified as DDD will be scrutinized to determine if staff members feel these additional funds are being allocated appropriately to address the individual needs of these students.

### **Limitations**

Within this study, the framework for qualitative research was followed throughout. However, the process of conducting qualitative research analysis can present several limitations, which are discussed by the researcher.

First, qualitative research quality is heavily dependent on the individual skills of the researcher and more easily influenced by the researcher's personal biases. The researcher is conducting his first qualitative analysis. It will be key for him to utilize peer debriefing to ensure he is collecting and analyzing all pertinent data for the study in an accurate and unbiased manner. It will also be very important for him, since he is familiar with so many variables within the study, to control any assumptions or preconceived ideas or thoughts about the educational programs in place for the students classified as DDD.

Secondly, the volume of data collected through prolonged engagement makes analysis and interpretation time consuming. The researcher will need to thoroughly and

accurately record all data. The usage of an audit trail will help the researcher organize the mounds of data that are sure to accumulate throughout the research process. Again, the usage of a peer researcher, outside the study, will help immensely throughout the research process.

Thirdly, the researcher's presence during data gathering, which is often unavoidable in qualitative research, can affect the subjects' responses. The researcher must be able to present himself to others, most especially the research participants, as someone who is simply trying to gather evidence from staff members that may help strengthen the educational programs in place for the students classified as DDD. The researcher must adhere to all ethical and legal standards and procedures throughout the research process.

Finally, findings can be more difficult to understand or interpret without visual representations for what the data shows. Without the usage of visual representations or aides to report his findings, the researcher will need to accurately and descriptively report findings in a way that the readers can draw a mental image of the big picture as it develops. This will take the ability of the researcher to use several qualitative methods to ensure rich descriptions of the programs are drawn from the staff's perspective.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

*Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)* – an individual state's measure of the minimum level of academic improvement that schools and districts must achieve each year (NCLB, 2001).

*Academic Success* – the achievement of the minimum state standards (NCLB, 2001).

*Alleged offender* – a person with mental retardation who was committed to SSLC as a result of being charged with or convicted of a criminal offense (or) has been found to have engaged in delinquent conduct constituting a criminal offense.

*At-Risk* – Label intended for students who may have a higher chance of not completing high school. The at-risk label may be applied for several of the following reasons: school discipline, home life such as death of parent, free/reduced lunch, failed stated mandated test, English as a second language (Pallas, 1989).

*Behavior intervention plan* - the written plan used to address problem behavior that includes positive behavioral interventions, strategies and support. This may include program modifications and supplementary aids and services.

*Behavior support specialist* – is an individual who is hired to provide positive behavioral training and intervention services to DDD students at MSSLC. He/she is required to attend ARD meetings and keep accurate documentation of student progress both academically and socially.

*Client* – a person with mental retardation who receives ICF-MR services from a SSLC.

*Core courses* – Courses that are part of the required curriculum to graduate from high school but are not generally thought of as “electives.” Core classes will include: social studies, English, math, science and foreign language classes (College Board, 2009).

*Direct Care Employee* – means a center employee who provides direct delivery of services to a client.

*Drop out* – A student who voluntarily leaves school before graduation and does not enroll in another school within one year (Texas Education Agency, 2008).

*Economically Disadvantaged* – a term that describes students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch or other public assistance (TEA, 2008).

*Emotionally Disturbed (ED)* - (as defined by IDEA) means a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance:

*Functional behavior assessment* - A problem solving process for addressing inappropriate behavior.

*High-risk Alleged Offender* – means an alleged offender resident who has the potential for inflicting substantial physical harm to another.

*Individual education plan* – a legal document designed by a team of educators, specialists, and the child's parent(s)/guardian(s) that outlines the child's learning/behavioral goals and objectives. This document must be updated at least every 12 months; however, an IEP team meeting can be called by any member of the team at anytime. The IEP includes a description of the child's present level of educational performance and identifies annual goals and objectives along with methods for assessing progress toward goals and objectives. In addition, the IEP includes any necessary supports, accommodations, adaptations, and/or related services (Walsh, Kemerer, & Maniotis, 2005).

*Intellectual Disability* - is a disability characterized by significant limitations both in

intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior as expressed in conceptual, social, and practical adaptive skills. This term will be used in place of Mental Retardation (MR).

*Learning Disabled (LD)* - As currently defined in IDEA, the term refers to a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. These include conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of: visual, hearing, or motor disabilities; of mental retardation; of emotional disturbance; or, of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage (IDEA).

*Least restrict environment* - refers to the concept that children with disabilities should be educated to the maximum extent possible with children who are not disabled while meeting all their learning needs and physical requirements. The type of setting is stipulated in a child's IEP (Walsh, Kemerer, & Maniotis, 2005).

*No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)* – Public law 107–110: 107th Congress signed into effect January 8, 2002. The purpose of the act is to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so no child is left behind (NCLB, 2001).

*Sub-group or Sub-population* – A particular group within a larger group of students as

defined by the state and federal governments. No Child Left Behind identifies these groups as African-American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Free or Reduced Lunch, Hispanic/Latino, Limited English Proficient, Native American, and Special Education (NCLB, 2001).

*Texas Education Agency (TEA)* – TEA is a branch of the state government of Texas which oversees public primary and secondary education as well as charter schools in the state of Texas.

*Title I Schools* – schools eligible for participation in programs authorized by Title I of Public Law 107-110, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2002. Those with *school-wide programs* are schools in which all students have been designated by state and federal regulations as eligible for participation in Title I programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

### **Organization of the Study**

This record of study is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is an introduction to the problem and a background for the study including the significance and need for this particular study. Furthermore, Chapter I included an account of the methodology, research questions, limitations associated with the study. Finally, Chapter I provided a definition of key terms for the reader.

Chapter II will give the general framework of Special Education history, laws, and current practice in public school systems. Further, this chapter connects the problem of subjectivity surrounding decision-making and how that sets special education students on a collision course with the juvenile justice system. In addition, Chapter II discusses

leadership theories that would best ensure more students who are in special education, and in most cases, minority students, get a better more equitable education within the public school systems across the country. Ultimately, this chapter articulates and describes the students classified as DDD and the general obstacles that are common in their journey to attain academic success.

The third chapter will outline the methodology utilized along with a description of the data content, selection, and analysis. Chapter IV will include the results of the study. Chapter V will discuss the study's findings and make recommendations for theory, practice, and future research directions.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

Currently, schools across America and the State of Texas are changing at a dramatic rate. School districts must be equipped with the resources to serve all students. Serving each and every child is not only a duty of educators but it is their moral obligation as well. Whether the student is highly intelligent or faces severe academic or behavioral challenges, educators must be willing to serve these students in an equitable and just manner. This chapter will present an extensive literature review over Special Education history and law in the United States and Texas, analyze students characterized as Developmentally Delayed Delinquents (DDD), discuss how special education students, mostly students of color, seem to interface with school discipline and the juvenile justice system, discuss policies in place to serve these students from the federal and state level, discuss what type of leadership theories would serve these students best, and finally, discuss instructional components required to service special needs students.

#### **Special Education Legal History**

Historically, several important laws have been established over the last half-century and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that impact special education. Judicial involvement in education peaked in the 1970s with several key Supreme Court cases that forced laws to change to better serve all students (McCarthy 2008). The laws helped bring about a positive change for all education but especially for students within at-risk

populations. The four most notable established laws addressing SPED and accountability are: Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1992 (IDEA), and No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB).

The ESEA provided a framework to address the fact that educators were not educating our economically underprivileged children (Walsh, Kemerer, & Maniotis, 2005). Several amendments strengthened the ESEA throughout the 1960s and 1970s: P.L. 89-313 established grant opportunities to state operated schools serving children with disabilities; P.L. 89-750 provided assistance at the local level by providing grants to those serving children with disabilities; P.L. 90-247 provided additional funds for the expansion of SPED services to students; and, P.L. 91-230 established several discretionary programs to support SPED.

P.L. 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, mandated a free and appropriate public education for all students served with a disability, ensured due process rights were being afforded to these students, and called for the development of individual education plans (IEP) for each student, (Parents United Together, 2009). The IEP plans are discussed and drafted in the Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) committee meetings and carried out by teachers in the classroom. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act established in 1990 and reauthorized in 1997 helped strengthen the system to better educate students with disabilities across America and Texas. IDEA 1997 included steps to increase parent involvement, ensure access to the general curriculum, strengthen teaching and learning

in the classroom, assist local education agencies with the high cost of improving SPED services, increase attention to race, ethnic, and linguistic diversities within schools, increase safety within our schools, and encourage a “marble cake” companionship amongst educators and parents by working together to educate our children (Walsh et al., 2005).

No child Left Behind, which was signed into law on January 8, 2002, is the updated version of the 1965 ESEA. NCLB has been regarded as the most influential Federal education policy in a generation. The purpose of NCLB is to ensure that every child in our nation is receiving a quality education and that no child is being left behind regardless of race, gender, disability, or social class. NCLB has brought accountability to the doorstep of educational organizations and has forced educators to establish a learning environment suitable for all students to learn and be successful. Martinez and Olsen (2004) state, “The passage of the NCLB Act and subsequent regulations have challenged State Education Agencies (SEA) in many ways and ensuring the appropriate inclusion of students with disabilities has been a unique challenge” (p. 1). This is accomplished at the state level by the immersion of SPED testing into the state accountability ratings.

### **Special Education Program**

To address the changes in laws over time, schools and school personnel have had to become proficient in addressing the needs of SPED students (Jones, 2010). Programs were established and evaluated on a yearly and sometimes more frequent basis. The most visible program within schools is the SPED program. The SPED program serves students who are classified as: mentally retarded (MR), emotionally disturbed (ED),

learning disabled (LD), or otherwise health impaired (OHI), according to Walsh et al. (2005). Disabilities generally associated with OHI are attention deficient, hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), attention deficient disorder (ADD), vision impaired, bi-polar manic depressant, deaf, or speech impaired (Jones, 2010). Students are eligible to receive SPED services if they meet two requirements, “Students must have a disability that qualifies under the law, and that disability [then]results in an educational need for special education services,” according to Walsh et al. (2005). A Full Individual Evaluation (FIE) must be conducted before a student can be placed into SPED (Hale, 2011). Once in SPED, an FIE must be conducted every three years. After the evaluation process has been completed and the mental or physical disability has been determined, both students and parents will take part in an ARD meeting to determine: placement, the best educational services, and the most appropriate IEP for each student (Hale, 2011).

Once students are selected to be in the SPED program, there is a process that must be followed according to law that will look at each student’s individual needs to develop the best suited program for that individual student (Hale, 2011). This process is known as the ARD committee meeting. The primary functions of the ARD are to develop the student’s IEP and decide on his or her placement, according to Walsh et al. (2005). ARD committees are composed of the student, parents, special education staff, general education teachers, and generally, a diagnostician who writes the IEP for the student, as required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004. The goal for the ARD committee is to develop IEPs and select interventions that will help the student be successful in his or her least restrictive environment (LRE) (Hale, 2011). To

effectively accomplish this, the ARD committee analyzes: teacher referrals; teacher observations and responses; formative, summative, and informative classroom assessments; and parent and student feedback (IDEA, 2004). Once all the data is gathered and analyzed, then the ARD committee will determine the appropriate placement and interventions for the student (Kavale, 2002). Ultimately, the strengths, weaknesses, and needs of each child are to be considered on an individual basis throughout the decision-making process.

### ***Educational Placements***

The goal of any SPED program is to work its students toward inclusion in the general education setting if possible (Kavale, 2002). According to Walsh et al. (2005), this allows the student to receive the same instruction and educational opportunities as his or her non-special education peers. However, this often times is not the case because of multiple variables that go into setting up an educational placement for a special education student. Three different placement options are commonly used in special education: inclusion, partial inclusion, and self-contained (Burns & Coolong-Chaffin, 2006).

The most controlled environment is the self-contained classroom (Chen, 2009). This instructional environment is created to foster support for students with more severe special needs. Self-contained classrooms frequently comprise around ten students who are instructed by a SPED certified teacher. This educational setting typically serves students with mild to severe cognitive delays who generally have a classification of intellectual disability (Walsh et al., 2005). Students in this setting are typically not

allowed to attend classes such as P.E., band, or any other elective dependent on each student's IEP. All educational related services are completed within this one environment, according to Chen (2009). Teachers who serve these students generally have experience as direct care employees. They understand how to physically, mentally, and emotionally care for these students on a daily basis (Hale, 2011). ARD committees conduct annual reviews of students assigned to the self contained classroom in order to reassess student placement and IEPs.

The partial inclusion schedule differs from the self contained classroom in that students are placed by their ARD committee in the general education environment for the bulk of the day, but are then “pulled out” to another instructional setting at different times when it is deemed appropriate to focus on individual needs (Kavale, 2002). For these students, the ARD committee has determined that the general education setting, or the LRE, may be workable but that support may be needed at various times to address educational, behavioral, or social issues that may arise (IDEA, 2004). According to Hale (2011), allowing the students to attend mainstream classes will give the ARD committee members the time and data they need to reassess the student's IEP. Once the ARD committee has collected the data they need to make a sound decision, changes may be made to the IEPs (IDEA, 2004). The opportunity for a disabled student to receive instruction in a general education setting helps to boost the student's self esteem, confidence, and self-efficacy, as stated by Kavale (2002).

In contrast, full inclusion refers to special education students who are totally immersed into the general education setting with non-special education students (Kavale,

2002). These particular students are enrolled in all general education courses throughout the day, but may receive special education support as needed. The road to inclusion provides an opportunity for diversity in the classroom, gives students a sense of belonging, and shows that everyone has unique characteristics, abilities and each has their own strengths (Jones, 2011). Again, the different levels and degrees of support are determined in each student's IEP. Some of the assistances include shortened assignment, oral administration of assessments, preferential seating, small group instruction, color overlays, calculator usage, supplemental aids and manipulatives (IDEA, 2004). Teachers and special education staff monitor these students in the general education setting very closely. Students in this stage of the special education program face more challenges mentally, physically, emotionally, and socially; therefore, they must be monitored more closely to determine if they are being successful with their current IEP (Kavale, 2002). The intervention model most typically used by schools to gauge student success in their current educational placement is the Response to Intervention (RTI) model.

### ***Intervention Model***

RTI is the practice of meeting the academic and behavior needs of all students through a variety of services containing the following elements, according to Burns and Coolong-Chafin (2006):

1. High-quality instruction with tiered interventions based on individual student needs.
2. Scheduled monitoring of student academic and/or behavior progress.

3. Applying data to make important decisions regarding interventions, placement, curriculum, and instructional goals for each student.

The RTI model is a system of checks and balances that works to eliminate the potentiality for a special education student to fall through the cracks or go unnoticed when he or she starts to have difficulty in his or her current educational placement (Hale, 2011). It requires the use of effective scientifically based instructional strategies, followed by immediate evaluation to gauge student progress (Burns & Coolong-Chaffin, 2006). This in turn allows an effective teacher to quickly adjust his or her teaching styles and strategies to meet the individual needs for each learner, according to Hale (2011).

Within the RTI model there are three tiers of support for each student. Any time a student is changed from one tier to another, or if any adjustments are made to meet the individual student's IEP, parents should be notified. Tier one is the least restrictive. Students within tier one are in the general education setting receiving scientifically based instruction and receive interventions as needed based on student request or teacher observation (Hale, 2011). Assessments within tier one are generally in the form of formative benchmarks throughout the year to gauge student progress, according to Burns and Coolong-Chaffin (2006).

Tier two becomes more restrictive and encompasses small group instruction, weekly progress monitoring to ensure adequate progress and learning, and sometimes offers an internal or external interventionist who will work with the student on an individual bases as needed (Hale, 2011). Normally, this group represents twenty percent of the students in tier one and will require remedial support and small group instruction



(Burns & Coolong-Chaffin, 2006). Typically, students are moved from tier one to tier two because they are not successful in the classroom. For example, if a student starts to fail a subject or has more difficulty keeping up with the current pace of instruction, then a decision for a tier change from one to two can be made without calling an ARD committee meeting. However, if a student is moved to tier three, an ARD committee meeting should be held.

Tier three is the most restrictive intervention within the RTI model, according to Burns and Coolong-Chaffin (2006). These students are having marked difficulty with their current educational placement. Between two percent and six percent of students in tier two typically do not make sufficient progress, according to Chen (2009). Students who require tier three support need homogeneous small group instruction, at least ninety minutes of core instruction in the area of difficulty, weekly progress monitoring, and instructional support from a qualified interventionist using scientifically based instructional strategies, according to Hale( 2011). At this point, the ARD committee should thoroughly look at all the data collected throughout the intervention process to determine if the student's current IEP and placement is appropriate for his or her abilities and needs (IDEA, 2004). Assessment data is critical to the problem-solving process, as stated by Burns and Coolong-Chaffin ( 2006).

This section has covered SPED history and law, presented information about special education programs, discussed different placement options governed by SPED law, and looked at the intervention model (RTI) most commonly used to serve SPED students in the most equitable manner. The next section will define and discuss students

classified as Developmentally Delayed Delinquent (DDD), who present their own individual challenges to the public school system.

### **Students Classified as Developmentally Delayed Delinquents (DDD)**

Throughout the history of America, children and students classified as developmentally delayed have often times been referred to as behavior problems. When the federal education law was passed in 1975, Congress found that most children with disabilities were not receiving an appropriate education and that millions of children were excluded from school altogether (Wright, 1998). Schools today still send these students home for behaviors that are directly linked to their disability. These students often become delinquent, feel worthless, are viewed as failures, stop trying, and a lot of the times end up in the juvenile justice system as a result of their treatment by those who are charged with educating them.

### ***Intellectual Disability Characteristics***

Students who have lower levels of cognitive ability or who are classified as intellectually disabled generally demonstrate characteristics such as: breaking of rules without awareness, lack of common sense, slowness in all areas, a tendency to be easily confused, a short attention span, inability to generalize, inability to transfer and conceptualize, lack of creativity, low frustration tolerance, lower verbal than performance scores on intelligence tests, distrust of one's own solutions, low reading level, little acceptance by peer groups, fear of failure, poor speech, and a tendency to be easily led (Kirk, 1972; Dunn, 1973). Additional characteristics noted by Martinez (2011) include slow to learn, slow to process thoughts, and an impaired adaptive ability.

Students classified as intellectually disabled generally are members of larger families, are students of color, and tend to come from lower socio-economic families.

### ***Intellectually Disabled Offender Characteristics***

Two studies conducted in the late 1960s by Farber (1968) and Blackhurst (1968) noted the following characteristics for students classified as intellectually disabled offenders: lack of physical handicap, display of fighting ability, sexual offenses, inability to differentiate between right and wrong, unable to control impulses, inability to cope with frustration, feelings of inferiority, inability to organize or sequence thought patterns, destructiveness, patterns of committing more crimes against persons, and abrupt emotional changes. Intellectually disabled offenders tend to have a complacent self-image and are inclined to be unstable rather than evil. Intellectually disabled offenders are more commonly referred to today as students classified as Developmentally Delayed Delinquents (DDD). Federal laws governing special education not only require schools to educate these individuals, but they also provide a blueprint through educational plans and programs that specifically address students classified as intellectually disabled along with their individual educational needs.

### ***Mental Competency***

One such program is the “Options for Justice,” which began with a mission to hold offenders with intellectual disabilities responsible for their actions, while at the same time advocating for fair and equitable treatment for them (Linhorst, 2002). An analysis conducted in Texas revealed that community resources do not meet the needs of students classified as intellectually disabled, who recently have been released from state

psychiatric or other hospitals, leaving the intellectual disabilities community with unmet residential and service needs (Shannon & Benson, 1999). Many of these same individuals enter the criminal system due to these unmet needs.

Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is yet another law that protects students classified as intellectually disabled DDD since it prohibits states and local governments from discriminating against an individual with a disability. The Association of Retarded Citizens (ARC) has published brochures and given them to different governmental agencies to help educate and inform them of characteristics typically associated with intellectual disability. In 1990, a report was completed by the Hogg Foundation for mental health, which expressed the need for law enforcement agencies and personnel to increase their knowledge levels concerning individuals with mental illness (Shannon & Benson, 1999). Educating law enforcement agencies will help to divert the disproportionate placement of intellectually disabled individuals behind bars.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) states that whenever there is “good faith doubt” about the defendant’s competency, an evaluation should be conducted by a psychologist to determine the level of functioning of the defendant based on a formally accepted diagnostic definition of intellectual disability (Shannon & Benson, 1999). Psychologists should have extensive knowledge in intellectual disability, forensics, court experience, and in addition, it is recommended that an instrument be used to help determine the competency of a person with intellectual disability (Shannon & Benson, 1999). In regards to juveniles, the Texas Family Code has been revised to address

proceedings concerning competency. Section 55.31(a) Unfitness to Proceed

Determination reads as follows:

A child alleged by petition or found to have engaged in delinquent conduct or conduct indicating a need for supervision who as a result of mental illness or intellectual disability lacks capacity to understand the proceedings in juvenile court or to assist in the child's own defense is unfit to proceed and shall not be subjected to discretionary transfer to the criminal court, adjudication, or modification of disposition as long as such incapacity ensues (Texas Family Code, Chapter 55).

The Association of Retarded Citizens (ARC) states individuals who are intellectually disabled exhibit the following characteristics: difficulty understanding judicial proceedings, inability to understand charges, inability to assist counsel, vulnerability to pressure during interrogation, inability to give an accurate and reliable confession, overly eager to please authority figures, inability to understand legal terms, and may plead guilty without truly understanding (ARC, 2003a). This is often referred to as acquiescence, or the tendency to agree with or say yes to statements or questions, regardless of the content of items (Finlay & Lyons, 2002). These incapacities necessitate the need for courts to allow a thorough psychiatric evaluation to be conducted before court proceedings move forward.

Intellectually disabled juvenile offenders are referred by courts to local Department of Aging and Disability Service (DADS) centers for comprehensive psychological assessments (Shannon & Benson, 1999). If the initial screenings from the comprehensive psychological assessments suggest functioning in the intellectual

disability range, the Juvenile Probation Officer will generally request an order from the presiding judge for a court ordered forensic evaluation from the community DADS center to determine competency (Shannon & Benson, 1999).

### ***Educational Treatment and Placement***

Treatment at the DADS forensic facilities are uniquely designed to meet the individual needs of a population that is much different from the typical Texas State School client (Featherston, 2001). All clients have been charged with criminal offenses, but proceedings have stopped due to incompetency issues related to their disability (Featherston, 2001). These individuals are then placed with the Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS). The ultimate goal for the treatment program is to enable the client to return and live successfully in a less restrictive environment (Featherston, 2001).

The Offenders Program at the MSSLC is committed to a comprehensive psychosocial program that meets the individual and unique needs of its clients in the least restrictive environment (Featherston, 2001). It is the belief of the MSSLC that individual responsibility and accountability is an essential part of living a successful life in the company of others in society. The treatment program at the MSSLC focuses on the following components: 1) increase empathic behavior, 2) increase social responsibility, 3) increase adaptive skills, 4) reduce maladaptive behaviors, and 5) facilitate reintegration of the adolescent into society (Featherston, 2001). Four therapy options are also used by the MSSLC to address individual needs including: 1) Orientation, 2) Group Structured Learning, 3) Psychodrama, and 4) Behavior

Modification/Therapy (Featherston, 2001). These treatment and therapy interventions and components are analyzed monthly and sometimes weekly to determine the progress of each individual offender.

Educational services are incorporated into the entire treatment philosophy, stemming from the concept that both academic and vocational skills are required for successful life in the community (Featherston, 2001). Academic and Vocational Educational services are provided by the MISD. Academically, school age students in the DDD program are enrolled in special and regular education classes. Students receive educational related services at the MSSLC or on MISD campuses based on individual needs and are served by MISD educators (Featherston, 2001). Students receive up to three hours a day of core academics in reading, writing, and mathematics.

Specializations or modifications are dependent on each student's IEP as determined by the ARD. Vocationally, students are involved in three to six hours of training where the focus is on skill development that will allow the client to gain meaningful and viable employment when he enters the community (Featherston, 2001). Examples of training include horticulture and landscape work, animal husbandry, janitorial and housekeeping, and recycling efforts (Featherston, 2001). Therapeutic interventions are aimed at the whole person, i.e., behavior, sensation, imagery, cognition, and interpersonal skills. It is the program's goal to increase each individual's competency so he might become a productive member of society.

In this section we have discussed characteristics associated with the intellectual disability and intellectually disabled juvenile offenders, discussed what it means to be

incompetent to stand trial, and looked at treatment and educational opportunities awarded to these individuals by the ADA of 1992. The next section will illustrate how subjective decision making by federal and state employees aligns many of our students of color with SPED and eventually the judicial system.

### **Disproportionality in SPED and the Judicial System**

The disproportional placement of students of color and students of color with intellectual disabilities into the American prison system and juvenile justice systems due in part to a disciplinary track that starts in school is not a new phenomenon. Racial disproportion in the penal system has been around since the early 1800s. Although our laws and governing policies have become more protective, the effects of racial discrimination are still evident today, in part to subjective decision making, which starts in our schools and pipelines into the prison system. The last section looked at SPED law and governing policies, programs, and intervention models used to help students with special needs. This section will analyze disproportionate levels of disciplinary action administered to students of color in our schools based on subjective decision-making. A review of how schools, probationary officers, the juvenile justice systems and the lack of due process rights contribute to the overrepresentation of students of color in the juvenile justice system. Finally, how the results of subjectivity in our judicial system further develop the pipeline to prison for so many of our young students of color is examined along with the special needs that still exist for our young students of color in America today. Racial disproportions in the school setting, juvenile justice system, and prison system all mirror each other because of the subjectivity in policy and decision making.



A review of the literature reveals that many believe this process starts with the misunderstanding of these youth in the classroom.

### **School Disproportionality**

In recent years, the emphasis on school discipline has shifted from prevention to a correction model to a reactive and punitive model, according to Evenson, Justinger, Pelischek, and Schulz (2009). The “zero tolerance” model of discipline was intended to reduce subjectivity, but unfortunately since its inception, racial disproportions have not diminished. “Zero tolerance” in most districts focus on more severe disciplinary infractions such as drug possession, skipping, vandalism, fighting, and terroristic threats. Contrary to what people might perceive, zero tolerance has had a number of negative effects that has elevated rates of dropout, poor school climate, low academic achievement, and discriminatory school disciplinary practices, (Evenson, A., Justinger, B., Pelischek, E., & Schulz, S. 2009). The “zero tolerance” policy has also been seen as profiling students, which adds to the problem of subjectivity. Profiling is a method of recognizing those at risk of committing on offense, with those who are of similar background who have already engaged in such misbehavior (The American Psychological Association , 2008).

This stereotyping hurts many of our youth, but especially our students of color who come from low socio-economic backgrounds. Students in some schools are unfairly targeted based on the social class they represent (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Evenson et al, 2009). However, according to state law, districts are able to set local policy governing less severe disciplinary infractions, according to Wald and Losen

(2003). These district policies are aligned with less severe consequences and are outlined in district handbooks, which are often not accessible to nor discussed with parents so that clarity issues do not arise. Wald and Losen (2003) further add:

Despite the seeming objective neutrality of a policy titled ‘Zero Tolerance,’ the actual operations of school discipline and related systems reveal a host of subjective factors that appear to be a breeding medium for disparities and discrimination. For example, one study found that African American students are punished more severely for lesser offenses, such as ‘disrespect, excessive noise, threat or loitering’ than their [W]hite peers. (p. 3)

Laws do not specify what infractions constitute suspension or expulsion, but rather local districts have flexibility in setting their disciplinary code and penalties (The Education Rights Center at Howard University School of Law, 2011).

When district administrators leave such codes and penalties up to subjective decision-making, students of color are more directly discriminated against. The discriminatory treatment of African American students in school discipline is not an isolated phenomenon, but appears to be part of a complex system of inequities that leads to overrepresentation in special education and drop out (Skiba et al., 2002; Evenson et al., 2009; Wald & Losen, 2000). When excluded from school, students are allowed to spend unsupervised time on the streets further jeopardizing their social success (Townsend, 2000). Suspended and expelled children and youth are at greater risk for encountering the legal system. School exclusion of our students of color increases their opportunities to engage in illegal behaviors and contributes to leaving school early

(Townsend, 2000). The effects of school disengagement for students of color fuels feelings of school disconnectedness, which is linked to higher levels of substance use, violence, suicide attempts, pregnancy, and emotional distress (Wald & Losen, 2003). As a result, more students of color lose faith in our educational system because of its dual policies and decision-making. Unfortunately, this sets a lot of students of color on a path that is almost certain to intercept with the juvenile correctional system. Thus, researchers refer to this phenomenon as the pipeline to prison for many of our minority youth in America.

### **Juvenile Justice System**

Racial discrimination because of subjective practices does not stop with the school system. Inequalities permeate the juvenile justice system as well once students of color enter the legal system. Bell and Ridolfi (2008) state:

Tonight, more than 90,000 youth in this nation will sleep somewhere other than their homes, in the custody of the juvenile justice system. For Latino youth, the chance of this occurring is more than double that of White youth. For African American youth, the chance is more than five times that of White youth. (p. 2)

Students of color are arrested, charged, and incarcerated more so than White youth for similar conduct. Racial disproportion exists for youth at every decision-making point in the juvenile justice system, according to Cahn (2006). The zero tolerance policy and the “get tough” on crime stance in schools over the last two decades has pushed a lot of students of color into the juvenile justice system (APA, 2008; Evenson et al., 2009; Skiba et al., 2002; Wald & Losen, 2003). In 1980, over fourteen percent of all juvenile

drug arrests were African American youth; by 1990, African American youth arrests for drug offenses had risen to over forty-eight percent (Cahn, 2006). Pope and Feyerherm (1995) maintain:

Processing decisions in many State and local juvenile justice systems are not racially neutral: Students of color are more likely than other youth to become involved in the system. The effects of race may be felt at various decision points, they may be direct or indirect, and they may accumulate as youth continue through the system. (p. 1)

Most importantly, youth of color are incarcerated at rates that cannot be explained by crime alone (Bell & Ridolfi, 2008).

Nationally, several studies were completed in 1990 to gauge racial disparity in the juvenile justice system. In Florida, race did make a difference with regard to outcome decisions. When the researchers surveyed intake workers and judges, most respondents thought that race did make a difference in the Florida juvenile justice system, according to Pope and Feyerherm (1995). Similar studies were also completed in Georgia and Missouri yielding comparable results. Once incarcerated, students of color face a host of challenges including institutional racism and discriminatory sentencing policies. In many cases, these youth waive their right to representation, which can have catastrophic effects to their current life and their livelihood once released.

Representation is subpar at best in most cases; lawyers often do not even know the youth's name and are unprepared to deliver a sound defense.

Furthermore, probationary officers often provide background information to the lawyers and judges who ultimately sentence these youth, which is appalling. Cahn (2006) states, “Prosecutors, defense attorneys, and judges rely on probationary offices for essential background information, predisposition investigations and making sentencing recommendations” (p. 6). In Texas, defense lawyers are often overburdened with caseloads and depend on probationary officers for this key information. Many of these lawyers do not investigate the individual needs of the youth nor do they investigate the facts related to the case before representing their clients. Thus, subjective decision-making permeates the juvenile justice system from arrest to sentencing.

Disparities in the juvenile justice system have been around since the mid 1800s. African American children were denied rehabilitation services and often found themselves either in adult prisons or forced back into slavery by a retooling method proposed by the judicial system. Bell and Ridolfi (2008) explain:

The overrepresentation of youth of color in the early penal system served as a convenient solution for labor needs in the post-Civil War South. A significant reason for opening the Baltimore House of Reformation for Black Children in Maryland was ‘the need for agriculture labor through the state, as well as the great want of competent house servants. (p. 4)

The same disparities existed for Native Americans as well. “Kill the Indian, Save the Man” camps were set up to assimilate these Native American youth to the European ways of live (Bell & Ridolfi, 2008). During this time the White culture was dominant and these individuals made subjective decisions to assimilate children and students of

color to the White customs much like White teachers of today do in their classrooms. Whether you are talking about current day New York, New York in 1834, Baltimore, Maryland in 1850, the 1850 census by W.E.B. Du Bois, Waco, TX in 1916, or Los Angeles, California in 1940 or 2007, racial disproportion existed and still exists today in the juvenile justice systems of America (Bell & Ridolfi, 2008; Cahn, 2006; Pope & Feyerherm, 1995).

### **Racial Disproportion and the American Prison System**

Harrison and Beck (2006) provide concrete evidence of the racial disproportion that still exists in the American prison system: “In 2005, 1,525,924 individuals were incarcerated in state and federal prisons. Of these inmates forty percent were African American, thirty-five percent were White, and twenty percent were Hispanic” (p. 1). In 2005, African Americans were five times as likely to be jailed as Whites, (Spencer, 2006). Spencer (2006) further adds:

Consistent with rates over the last decade, an estimated 12 percent of young African American men were incarcerated last year. This translates into an even more astonishing incarceration rate over the course of a lifetime, with nearly a third of all African American men in America imprisoned at some point. (p. 2)

During this same time period, Hispanics were incarcerated at almost two times the rate of their White counterparts, according to Mauer and King ( 2007). If current trends remain the same, one in three African American males born after the turn of the century will be imprisoned during their lifetime, one in six Hispanic males will be imprisoned, compared to one in seventeen White males, concludes Garland, Spohn, and Wodahl

(2008). Statistically, people of color make up the largest percentage of individuals incarcerated in our prison systems today. The growth in prison populations has correlated with an increase in racial disproportion within prison (Maurer & King, 2007). Of the two million prisoners in the nation, nine hundred thousand of them are African American. However, research from the W. Hayword Burns Institute shows, Whites are committing crimes at comparable rates, but are not being incarcerated, according to Bell and Ridolfi(2008). Even when severity of offense and criminal histories are taken into consideration, African Americans and Hispanics are arrested more frequently and punished more harshly than White Americans (Sterling, 1998). Subjective decision making at all levels of the judicial system helps fan the fires of disproportional placement of individuals of color into the prison systems (Cahn, 2006).

### ***The Effects on the Individual***

Despite ethnicity or gender, imprisonment can have a devastating effect on an individual, on families, and on the community. Individuals that are forced into the prison system face extreme hardships before, during, and after their service (Sterling, 1998). Haney (2002) asserts, “Prisoner reactions to institutional life can include a dependence on the institutional structure, hyper vigilance, interpersonal distrust, psychological distancing, exploitive behavior, a diminished sense of self-worth, and post-traumatic stress (p. 7). Prison constructions force these individuals to be surrounded by violence and violent type behaviors on a daily basis. This environment presents many challenges to inmates both physically and mentally. Some of the psychological effects include depression, anger, and negative emotional states (Garland et al., 2008). Prisoners who

are presented with these hardships on a daily basis start to internalize many modes of inappropriate behavior and attitudes. This presents a critical dilemma when trying to stay connected to friends and family members, according to Garland et al. (2008). At this point, many see suicide as a viable option.

Post-incarceration presents many challenges as well since the individual has become institutionalized making reintegration back into daily society complex. Austin and Irwin (2001) note, “Prisoners confront extreme difficulties in adjusting to outside life and achieving basic viability, and most of their problems stem from having been a prisoner” (p. 136). Inmates released from prison may find many emotional and mental challenges on a variety of fronts. Socially, readjusting to civilian life presents many challenges. Reacquainting themselves with family members who have tried to move forward socially and financially with their lives and who may find it hard to welcome back an ex-prisoner into the family network can be a daunting task (Austin & Irwin, 2001; Bell & Ridolfi, 2008; Cahn, 2006; Garland et al., 2008).

In addition, employment options for these individuals are sparse at best. Normally, employment alternatives for released convicts include manual labor, minimum wage salaries, and no benefit packages. Barriers to employment include lack of education, substance abuse, or mental problems (Holzer, Raphael, & Stoll, 2003). These barriers present serious problems for an individual trying to readjust into a society that is financially driven. Ultimately, these individuals start to feel they have no human capital, which seriously darkens their future outlook. The high rate of disproportional



incarceration impacts the African American community more so than any other (Clear & Rose, 2003).

### *The Effects on the Community*

Incarceration effects a community as a whole, and therefore, presents many challenges. Garland et al. (2008) claim, “This is a key point that makes racial disproportion in incarceration the central race and justice issue facing policy makers and research” (p. 9). Removing the social, cultural, and economic capital from a community that already permeates with challenges can only spiral the community further out of control. Clear and Rose (2003) further explain:

Removing offenders from socially disorganized areas may undermine other social control efforts there. Conversely, incarceration may reinforce social control efforts in socially organized areas. This occurs because social networks and ties, which are the foundation of local social control, are already weakened in disorganized areas. Incarceration weakens them further. The result of an overreliance on incarceration, then, is a reduction in human and social capital and an increase in social isolation. This has led to the proliferation of communities without the tools necessary to adequately informal social control. (p. 29)

Garland et al. (2008) discuss a community in Tallahassee, Florida whose residents highlight four negative areas: “The stigma factor, financial cost of incarceration, identity problems, and damages to community relations that incarceration has on its community” (p. 10). Communities with a high concentration of released convicts do not draw much positive attention. Therefore, the community and its

inhabitants feel less worthy or shame from the effect of incarceration. Businesses are not as likely to move into this community for fear of criminal activity, which further adds to the problem of financial instability for the community. Adults and children alike often times feel less worthy because of the location or community they live in due to these factors. Ultimately, the social supports among community residents deteriorate to the point that community structures break down, according to Clear and Rose (2003), and Garland et al. (2008). It further becomes an area of guarded individual inhabitants instead of a socially functional vibrant community.

The high incarceration rate of males further adds problems to the family structure. High incarceration rates in the African American community have caused a break down in family structure and have had a debilitating effect on the community (Mauer & King, 2007). These variables cause strain on the family, especially the children. Children are left in many cases to fend for themselves. This leaves them vulnerable to outside influences that are often times negative. Ultimately, the high disproportion rate of incarceration for individuals of color further adds to the cycle of diminished self worth and self-capitol (Bell & Ridolfi, 2008; Cahn, 2006; Evenson et al., 2009; Garland et al., 2008; Skiba et al., 2002, Wald & Losen, 2003).

This section has presented a debilitating cycle based largely on subjective decision making by predominantly White teachers, case workers, policy officials, probationary officers, lawyers, and judges. These decisions take a large portion of our students of color, label them often times SPED, and then set them on a crash course with the juvenile justice system, and ultimately, confinement in state and federal prison

institutions. This discriminating cycle is harmful not only to the individual, but the communities these individuals represent and serve. The only way to start to break this discriminating cycle is through the acquisition of knowledge, the desire to become culturally proficient, and the moral obligation to create an equitable system for the future by leaders within the educational community. Scheurich and Skrla (2003) note:

We may have to see that our beliefs and attitudes are partly the cause of some of the problems. We may have to see that we have some biases that are hurting children. We may have to take a tough look at some things we would rather not look at. However, we deeply, strongly, emphatically believe that together we can do this. (p.4)

We all have to be willing to truly open our eyes and see inequities that we have been blinded to previously and then we must all be willing to take the necessary steps to bring about a more equitable system.

In this section, both school disproportional placement of students of color into SPED and referral to the principal's office were discussed along with how these disproportionate placements lead many students of color to the juvenile justice system, and ultimately, how this same road leads many of our men and women of color, who have been falsely labeled (SPED), to a life intertwined with the American prison system, as well as how this life effects both the individual and his or her community. This vicious cycle has seemed to permeate over decades. In the next section we will look at federal policies governing SPED.

## **Federal and State Educational Policies**

Several events brought about the increased involvement of the federal government in decisions previously left to the states: the launching of Sputnik in 1958; and one of our nation's most influential court cases, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* in 1964. These two influential events helped start the greatest educational reform movement our nation has known, as well as the civil rights movement. Wong (2008) states, "Congressional enactment of the 1964 Civil Rights Act sharpened the federal attention to the needs of disadvantaged students" (p.22). In 1965, the federal government highlighted and began to focus on poverty issues in America especially those surrounding students and their academic achievement. In 1965, the federal government adopted a major antipoverty educational program, Title I of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (Wong, 2008). This program was designed to provide additional assistance to schools that have a high at-risk population of students. At-risk can include students who are experiencing difficulty in the classroom, students who have cognitive, emotional, or behavior disabilities, and students who have become disengaged with school (McCarthy, 2008). Wong (2008) states, "The ESEA, arguably is the most important federal program in public schools since the 1960s, signaled the end of dual federalism and strengthened the notion of "marble cake" federalism where the national and sub national governments share responsibilities in the domestic arena" (p. 20). Towards the end of the 1970s, there were almost five hundred federally funded programs available to districts across the nation (McCarthy, 2008). The program's intent is to focus efforts on helping protect and raise achievement of our at-

risk populations.

During the mid 1990s there was a majority rule by the Republican Party in Congress. Wong (2008) states, “The new congressional leadership claimed a public mandate to shrink the federal role in social programs and to shift programmatic authority to state and local governments” (p. 22). During the 1990s, the Republican Party pushed to eliminate several programs established during the 1960s. Wong (2008) explains, “The passage of Improving America’s Schools Act in 1994 signaled the beginning of federal efforts to address accountability in its antipoverty programs” (p. 22). The major goal established in 1994 was to bring light to issues that have been kept in the dark for so long.

The most recent push by our federal government to strengthen educational programs and strive for the excellence of youth, including at-risk populations, was the establishment of The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), established in 2001. NCLB has brought change by using mandates, federal inducement funds, and by allowing time for capacity to build through the use of quality professional development, according to Wong (2008). This combination has helped the overall educational system emerge and change to better serve at-risk populations across America and in Texas. Federal funding has increased from one billion to over eleven billion since the implementation of NCLB in 2001 (McCarthy, 2008). These inducement funds are aimed at one thing, increased student achievement for all. The federal government forced change by creating and establishing laws that bring about equity and justice for all, according to McCarthy (2008). However, before change in educational programs can occur to better serve

SPED students, capacity must be enhanced in both the programs and its instructional staff, according to Malen and Rice (2004).

### **No Child Left Behind Act of 2002**

In 2002, NCLB began to hold all schools across America and Texas accountable. Over the last half century starting in the 1960s, the federal government has allocated additional aide to help states and local school districts close achievement gaps (Wong, 2008). Schools in Texas are primarily held accountable by how well their students perform on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge & Skills (TAKS) assessment each year beginning in March and ending in late April. These assessments are given to assess student progress, analyze instructional impacts, and ensure achievement gaps are closing across all ethnic and social groups. Grade level standards have been created and adopted by the State of Texas and are referred to as the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). It has been mandated by TEA that all SPED testing be included into state ratings by 2011. According to McDonnell and Elmore (1987), “Mandates are rules governing the action of individuals and agencies, and are intended to produce compliance” (p. 134). NCLB has forced change to occur because of legislative mandates that are written within its text. This has caused schools across the nation and state to take a hard look at its SPED programs, progresses, and services offered daily. It has forced educators to respond more quickly when students are having difficulty and provide the necessary interventions to help them get back on track towards academic success. Ultimately, NCLB has created a more equitable educational environment for all students to learn and grow both academically and socially. However, reform efforts are still

needed to bring innovation back into the classroom, which has been highlighted in the “blueprint for reform” document created under President Obama’s leadership.

### ***Blueprint for Reform***

In 2010, under the leadership of President Barak Obama, the United States Department of Education (USDE) began to look at reforming the current No Child Left Behind laws adopted in 2000. A “Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act” builds on five key priorities: 1) College and Career Ready Students, 2) Great Teachers and Leaders in every School, 3) Equity and Opportunity for All Students, 4) Raise the Bar and Reward Excellence, and 5) Promote Innovation and Continuous Improvement (USDE, 2010). The federal government’s goal is to ensure that when all students reach high school graduation, they are prepared to either enter college or a given career.

President Obama’s blueprint calls for a complete education for all students preparing them in all subjects so they might thrive in the global economy. USDE (2010) states, every student should graduate ready to enter the global work force, regardless of their income, race, ethnic or language background, or disability status. In order for this style of education to occur, each and every school within American must have great teachers and principals. President Obama’s blueprint calls for accountability, but also recommends rewarding these individuals when student growth is accomplished. USDE (2010) is calling on states and districts to identify highly effective teachers and principals on the basis of student growth and other factors. Fundamentally, student

growth will not occur across all student ethnic groups if an equitable opportunity is not awarded to all students. The USDE (2010) further asserts:

To give every student a fair chance to succeed, and give principals and teachers the resources to support student success, we will call on school districts and states to take steps to ensure equity, by such means as moving toward comparability in resources between high and low poverty schools. (p.5)

President Obama recognizes the need to continue to raise the bar within our public schools. Over the last half century, America has been falling behind several other industrial nations in math and science. The president understands that if we are to compete tomorrow we must prepare today. Most importantly, President Obama realizes that testing alone will not increase our global effectiveness.

Finally, under NCLB many facets surrounding public education have become standardized. Planning, instruction, professional development, and testing have all been tailored to pass a state developed test. Innovation and creativity in many ways have been taken out of the schools so educators can have more time to focus on and prepare for the “test.” Under President Obama’s blueprint, educators will be rewarded for bringing innovation back into the classroom. USDE (2010) states, “The Investing in Innovation Fund will support local and nonprofit leaders as they develop and scale up programs that have demonstrated success, and discover the next generation of innovative solutions” (p. 6). President Obama’s blueprint, although still focused on accountability for all, takes a more global position. President Obama is quoted in USDE (2010) as saying:



Today, more than ever, a world-class education is a prerequisite for success.

America was once the best-educated nation in the world. A generation ago, we led all nations in college completion, but today, ten countries have passed us. It is not that their students are smarter than ours. It is that these countries are being smarter about how to educate their students. And the countries that out-educate us today will out-compete us tomorrow. (p. 1)

Like NCLB, the Blueprint for Reform recognizes testing as a key element in improving student achievement for all, but most importantly takes into account that development of leaders within and outside the classroom is essential to student success and ultimately, it recognizes that innovation and continuous improvement is the only highway leading to the future that will ensure America's continued success.

In this section, federal and state policies governing SPED have been analyzed, their role in bringing about a more equitable system of education for all children and how NCLB has brought new standards and accountability to the door step of every school across the land has been reviewed and, finally, how President Obama's Blueprint for Reform will continue to push for excellence has been highlighted. In the next section we will look at leaders and what types of leadership theories might help bring about the change needed to ensure a more equitable system.

### **Educational Leadership**

This section will look at what it means to be a culturally responsive leader in the 21st century school building when dealing with special populations; discuss two leadership theories, (moral and transformational leadership) that can help transform our

schools into culturally proficient learning communities; and, finally discuss the many challenges involved in serving this population as well as how best to build capacity into instructional staff.

### ***Culturally Responsive Instructional Leadership***

Leadership is the single most critical factor that determines the success or failure of organizations (Bass, 1990). One important function of leadership is that it provides support for development in values, norms, organizational cultures, diversity and beliefs that enable the success of organizational development (Nahavandi, 2006). Cultural responsiveness can be defined as the process of “using cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students and teachers to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them. It teaches to and through the strength of these students. It is culturally validating and affirming” (Gay, 2000, p. 29). A culturally responsive instructional leader has the ability to transform a school and its instructional staff into a homogenous group of professionals who plan and carry out their daily operations free from perception and bias, free from subjective decision making, and possesses the knowledge and skills gained through quality professional development to meet the needs of each child by building upon and using their own cultural backgrounds and experiences in life. Two leadership theories, moral leadership and transformational leadership, most directly coincide with what it truly means to be a culturally responsive leader.

### ***Moral Leadership***

Fundamentally, moral leadership is about doing what is right. However, due to

internal and external biases, moral obligations and decisions are often overshadowed. Having meaning in our lives ties our behavior to a purpose (English, 2005). Educational leaders who grasp this fundamentally moral or spiritual concept also understand that schools are not merely places that are committed to academic pursuits, but are spaces where human imagination and creativity can be used to re-create our world. Moral leadership is the ability to give a school or organization an identity, or a set of values and beliefs. These schools stand for something concrete. There is a system of checks and balances, or proactive redundancy, as discussed by Scheurich and Skrla (2003) that continuously analyzes and evaluates these values and beliefs in correlation to student achievement.

### ***Transformational Leadership***

Transformational leadership, according to Lindsay Roberts (2005), requires a shift in thinking, possessing the ability to recognize privileges and oppressions and “to recognize that our schools contribute to disparities in achievement” (p. 111). Building a foundation of success for a program and its students, one in which each individual student’s needs are met on a daily basis, will require moral and transformational leadership if we are to change the vicious cycle that seems to send a large portion of our minority students to the juvenile justice system. The overrepresentation of students of color assigned to correctional facilities in Texas mirrors that of our nation. A research study conducted in Maryland revealed that students of color with similar mental disorders, criminal histories, or mental health problems were sent to correctional facilities; whereas, their White counterparts were sent to residential treatment centers

(Drakeford & Garfinkel, 2000). The real problem with inequity is improper diagnosis of mental or emotional disorders leading to improper educational assistance for these students of color, added Drakeford and Garfinkel (2000). The change necessary to eliminate this overrepresentation in special education by our minority students will not occur quickly because entrenched policies and beliefs have become culture for so many. However, change can be enacted and this debilitating culture ended when leaders who possess both an internal moral compass and transformational skills take the helm.

In any organization or industry, success starts with leadership. Leadership is the single most important component within any organization. This section discussed what it means to be a culturally proficient leader, and framed two leadership theories that are most closely aligned to cultural proficiency. To create a culturally proficient school, it takes more than just leadership. It also takes a sound competent instructional staff. The next section will discuss: pedagogical incompetence, which leads to many disproportionality issues in schools; the need to build capacity in the instructional staff; and ultimately, the importance of having a competent, culturally proficient instructional staff.

### **Instructional Program**

Since 1986, African American and Latino students have steadily grown more segregated from Whites in their schools, according to Wald and Losen (2003). Research suggests that one of the main components to this phenomenon is a lack of pedagogical, cultural, and classroom management competence by a majority population of teachers who are White (Townsend, 2000). Schools today are staffed with teachers who come

from a predominantly White dominant culture (Lindsey & Robert, 2005). These individuals lack the cultural background or experiences to instruct or relate to students of color. With the increasing number of African American students enrolled in our nation's classrooms, it is highly probable that these students will be instructed by teachers whose ethnicity bears little resemblance to their own (Townsend, 2000).

These "White" teachers are not accustomed and adequately trained in their post-secondary course study to work closely with students of color. Culturally, many students of color are able to perform many tasks at once, which often include watching TV, listening to music, and collaborating while also performing subject matter duties, according to Townsend (2000). This goes against the standard pedagogical methods taught in most universities. In a study conducted by Skiba et al. (2002), they noted that administration of consequences quantitatively did not show a significant difference by measures of race. However, their analysis did show a disproportionate rate of referrals to the office from the classroom based on race. The American Psychological Association, APA (2008) states, "Emerging professional opinion, qualitative research findings, and a substantive empirical literature from social psychology suggest that the disproportionate discipline of students of color may be due to lack of teacher preparation in classroom management, lack of training in culturally competent practices, or racial stereotypes" (p. 854).

Students of color, especially boys, are referred to the office more frequently by teachers for less severe infractions such as disrespect, excessive noise, loitering, classroom disruption, chronic tardiness, and failure to follow school rules than their

White peers, according to Ross (2010). Numerous studies have found that boys are four times as likely to end up in the office due to teacher referral resulting in suspension than are girls (Skiba et al., 2002). Studies also show African-American students are receiving harsher punishment than their White peers for the same types of misbehavior and students of color are disproportionately disciplined for “subjective” offenses like “disrespect” compared to their White peers (Ross, 2010). In 2000, African Americans represented seventeen percent of the student population, but thirty-four percent of the seventeen percent were suspended (Wald & Losen, 2003).

Nationally, African American students are 2.6 times as likely to be suspended as White students. Often times these same students are referred to special education due to their perceived lack of concentration or effort, according to Evenson et al. (2009).

Nationwide, African American students are nearly three times as likely as White students to be labeled intellectually disabled and almost twice as likely to be labeled as having emotional disturbance (Wald & Losen, 2000). This further adds to the problem of racial disproportion and segregation based on subjective teacher disciplinary referrals because students with ADHD are three and a half times to seven times more likely to be expelled. Students with disabilities make up only about eleven percent of the school population in the U.S., while they account for almost twenty percent of school suspension, according to Evenson et al. (2009). With the added pressures of school accountability and the increased demand to close achievement gaps, how can students of color learn if they are persistently being excluded from the classroom environment by placing them in SPED or sending them to the principal’s office?

### ***Instructional Capacity Building***

Since the inclusion of NCLB in 2001, many changes and program implementations to increase student achievement have occurred in public education. Effective change cannot occur if there is not time for capacity to be built within a person or an organization, states Malen and Rice (2004). NCLB and the federal government forced this change to occur, but the architects of NCLB were wise enough to allow districts and their staff time to build the capacity needed first to bring about the change needed in public education. Typically, capacity is generated through quality professional development with focus on instruction, goal setting, accelerated instructional practices, and additional resources needed to move students forward (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987). Also, according to McDonnell and Elmore (1987), “Capacity-building is the transfer of money for the purpose of investment in materials, intellectual, or human resources” (p. 134). These professional development opportunities were funded primarily by inducement money from the federal government in the form of grants to the local education agencies (Wong, 2008).

Capacity is the school’s fiscal, human, social, and cultural capital, as well as its information resources (Malen & Rice, 2004). For the first time ever, schools were held accountable for how well “ALL” their students performed on state developed assessment. Students were falling behind and through the cracks, and that is not acceptable. Therefore, according to Malen and Rice (2004) with the implementation of state assessments, accountability measures, and with the inclusion of SPED testing, teachers and administrators were forced to get on board in a hurry to ensure their district

would meet national and state standards. Effective capacity building takes time, effective planning, and a willingness to change on the part of educators across America and the State of Texas (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987).

### ***Instructional Staffing***

Instructional leaders in the classroom are the most influential individuals in schools today. Without the acquisition of knowledge needed to interact and educate all students within the public school system, schools will continue to fail. To educate special populations, we must seek to find culturally proficient instructional leaders for the classroom. This is bold instructional leadership, which must be in place for these students. Teachers who are hired must be willing to progress through the stages of the cultural continuum to break down internal barriers with the goal in mind to better serve these students. Lindsay and Roberts (2005), quote Daniel Goleman (1995):

Being able to put aside one's self-centered focus and impulses has social benefits: It opens the way to empathy, to real listening, to taking another person's perspective. Empathy...leads to caring, altruism, and compassion. Seeing things from another's perspective breaks down biased stereotypes, and so breeds tolerance and acceptance of differences. (p. 51)

This is the key to educational attainment for students with special needs who are primarily students of color. If the politicians only focus on testing and accountability measures and we as a nation fail to raise the level of cultural competence in our teaching, the entire educational reform movement will fail, as stated by Howard (2006). Educational leaders who are directly involved in decision making for educational



programs must place culturally proficient instructional staffing as one of the most important pillars for the program to build upon.

### **Summary**

This chapter has presented a comprehensive literature analysis of special education history, programs, placement options, and the intervention model most commonly used; defined and discussed the students classified as DDD and their individual needs and challenges; analyzed the problem of disproportional placement into SPED and eventually the judicial system based largely in part to subjective decision making; outlined the policies governing SPED at the federal and state level and the impact NCLB has had on accountability; framed the most appropriate leadership theories and practices that serve students identified by special education most equitably; and finally, the instructional capacity and staff needed to serve these students to ensure a moral and equitable system of education. Chapter 3 will outline the methods and methodology used to collect and analyze data used to determine if the MISD is offering equitable and just educational programs for the DDD students currently housed at the MSSLC.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter explains in depth the methodology and processes to be used to conduct a thorough investigation of the educational services provided to the students classified as DDD by the MISD. First, the methodology and methods used in this study will be outlined. Second, the chosen research design is described including how data is selected, counted, and analyzed, and finally, the procedures used by the researcher are explained to ensure trustworthiness throughout the study.

#### **Methodology**

Due to the enactment of SB 643 Main ISD will need to thoroughly analyze and evaluate its special programs for the Developmentally Delayed Delinquents (DDD). The purpose of this study is to thoroughly analyze and evaluate the educational programs in place for the students classified as DDD on the high school and alternative campus. The epistemology of interpretivism has multiple truths based on each individual's lived experiences, according to Lather (2007). Merriam (1991) adds the epistemology of interpretivism "assumes that there are multiple realities" (p. 48). The MISD staff comes from an array of social, ethnic, and academic backgrounds. Each one's own personal and professional experiences vary. In addition, Merriam (1991) states "that reality is not an object that can be discovered and measured but rather a construction of the human mind" (p.48). Due to the extreme variances between the MISD staff's social, ethnic, and

academic backgrounds, finding one truth concerning their perceptions of the educational programs in place for the students classified as DDD is almost certainly impossible.

The methodology best suited for this study is participant observation as described by Lather (2007). Merriam (1991) adds that “unlike the natural scientist’s view of research, which stresses objectivity and distance from what is being studied, interpretive research cannot get ‘outside’ the phenomenon. In fact, the researcher is typically closely involved with who is being researched” (p. 49). As stated above, to truly know and understand the MISD staff members, who work directly with the DDD students, the researcher worked closely with them on a frequent basis. This created a more intimate relationship between the researcher and the participants in the research environment. Observations were conducted on the MISD high school campus and the MISD alternative campus. The intention was to understand their experiences and perceptions for given situations through close proximity and observation.

Merriam (1991) most clearly defines the methods of qualitative research by explaining, “The major data strategies of this type of research include interviewing, observing, and analyzing documents” (p. 49). District administration, campus principals, and teachers who are directly involved with these students were observed and interviewed to gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives on the educational programs and services that are being provided. Documents were also collected from the staff that helped add clarity to the research study. The school district receives approximately \$1.6 million, which is a weight of four times the usual weighted average daily attendance (WADA), to educate the students classified as DDD. This additional

revenue generated by the students classified as DDD from the federal government was discussed to determine if MISD staff members feel the extra funds are used appropriately to provide the needed resources they need to educate the students classified as DDD.

### ***Relevance***

The importance of qualitative research is to better understand the subjects being studied. Qualitative methods can be used to better understand any phenomenon about which little is yet known (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These same methods can be used to enrich perspectives and gain more in-depth information that would be hard to obtain through quantitative research. The ability of qualitative data to more fully describe a phenomenon is an important consideration not only from the researcher's perspective, but from the reader's perspective as well (Hoepfl, 1997). Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain, "If you want people to understand better than they otherwise might, provide them information in the form in which they usually experience it" (p. 120). Qualitative research reports characteristically are rich with detail and insights into participants' experiences of the world, and "may be epistemologically in harmony with the reader's experience" (Stake, 1978, p.5) and thus more meaningful.

A number of researchers have identified what they consider to be the prominent characteristics of qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990; Eisener, 1991). These researchers compiled the following list that describes qualitative research: 1) in qualitative research the natural setting is used as the source of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher attempts to observe, describe,

and interpret settings as they are, maintaining what Patton calls an “empathic neutrality” (1990, p. 55); 2) The researchers within qualitative research are used as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985); 3) Inductive data analysis is primary used by qualitative researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985); 4) Qualitative research is highly descriptive, very expressive in nature, and has a “presence of voice in the text” (Eisener, 1991, p. 36); 5) Qualitative research has an interpretive characteristic, the focus is to discover the importance events have on the individuals who experience them in their own contexts and provide insight into the understanding the research formulates from those meanings (Guba & Lincoln, 1985); 6) Qualitative researchers tend to use the entire spectrum of collected information in an effort to find the uniqueness of each case (Guba & Lincoln, 1985); 7) Qualitative research has an emergent (rather than a predetermined) design and the focus is on the emerging method, which allows for flexibility and openness by the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1985); 8) Special criteria is used to ensure trustworthiness when evaluating in qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

Patton (1990) points out that these are not “absolute characteristics of qualitative inquiry, but rather strategic ideals that provide a direction and a framework for developing specific design and concrete data collection tactics” (p. 59). These characteristics are considered to be “interconnected” (Patton, 1990, p. 40) and “mutually reinforcing” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 39). It is imperative for the researcher to highlight the emergent composition of qualitative research. Since the focus in qualitative research is to observe and interpret meanings in context, research strategies

should not be finalized before data collection has started (Patton, 1990). A thorough qualitative research proposal should layout specific questions that will be explored as well as data collection plans.

The purpose of a qualitative study determines the particular design used by the researcher as well as what information is useful and most credible. Criteria for sample size in qualitative research have no set parameters (Patton, 1990). According to Eisner (1991), “Qualitative studies typically employ multiple forms of evidence....[and] there is no statistical test of significance to determine if results count” ( p. 39). The researcher and the reader determine judgment about usefulness and credibility.

### ***Emergent Design***

Qualitative inquiry designs cannot be framed before the researcher enters the environmental context in which the study is to take place. Even though the topic, observations, and interview questions might be preliminarily set or determined, the researcher cannot eliminate any plausible variables, testable hypotheses, or decide instrumentation or sampling schemes. Research phenomenon opens up or materializes as fieldwork commences (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). Lincoln and Guba (1985) provide a detailed contrast between qualitative inquiry and experimental methods. They interpreted:

What these considerations add up to is that the design of a qualitative inquiry (whether research, evaluation, or policy analysis) cannot be given in advance; it must emerge, develop, unfold...The call for an emergent design by qualitative researchers is not simply an effort on their part to get around the ‘hard thinking’

that is supposed to precede an inquiry; the desire to permit events to unfold is not merely a way of rationalizing what is at bottom ‘sloppy inquiry.’ The design specifications of the conventional paradigm form a procrustean bed of such a nature as to make it impossible for the naturalist to lie in it – not only uncomfortable, but at all. (p. 225).

Qualitative research seeks to probe deeply into the research setting to obtain in-depth understandings about the way things are, why they are that way, and how the participants in the context perceive them (Gay & Airasian, 2003). As the inquiry unfolds, qualitative researchers are not concerned simply with describing the way things are, but they wish to provide insights into what people believe and feel about the way things are as information emerges over time. The researcher strives to enter the setting with no preconceived notions about the context, participants, or data desired, letting the purpose of the study “emerge” as information is collected in the participant’s natural setting (Gay & Airasian, 2003).

### ***Truth***

The goal of research is to try and find something of truth about the area of investigation. The process of research is not to uncover a truth, which is segregated from the researcher. However, aiming for truth in research often times is a meaningless exercise. Moreover, truth is intimately associated with questions of meaning, and creating the nature of that relationship is complicated and contested (Schwandt, 2007). John Dewey (1859-1952) states that truth of assertions is determined by whether they function well in making our way in understanding the world (Schwandt, 2007). Hans-

Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), Charles Taylor, and others believe “truth is a property or content over which interpretations ‘compete,’ and the better (more perspicuous and perspicacious) account offers an epistemic gain over the account that is less so” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 301).

Pragmatists, such as James, Dewey and Peirce believe that inquiry can make a practical difference in the world. According to pragmatic perspective, science is not a freestanding system for its own sake; rather, science serves humanity. There should be consequences that flow from research and inquiry that somehow or other lead to resolution of problems that we care about. A pragmatic conception of research defines the epistemic values of research results “practically.” A theory or set of measurements should be “good enough” for the needs of the problem, rather than aspiring to an abstract notion of perfect precision. The standards of precision and truthfulness are set by the needs of the problem to be solved, rather than existing as freestanding requirements of ever-greater precision. Cherryholmes (1992) contends, “Our choice simply means that one approach is better than another at producing anticipated or desired outcomes” (p. 15). The goal of investigation becomes the result of practice rather than whether the outcomes of the inquiry relate to a set reality (Garrison, 1994).

Truth is captured into four different types. T4 is the empirical truth of science meaning the claim is true if it is consistent with nature. T3 claims it is true if it is logically consistent with another claim known to be true. T2 is true if the person who asserts it is acting in conformity with accepted standards of conduct. T1 is the



metaphysical truth and cannot be tested against some external standard (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As Stake (1978) pointed out:

There is too great a temptation to suppose that truth is to be found in words and to suppose that intuitions are only poor facsimiles of truth. In practical matters, what is in fact true is that which is understood...In any circumstance the truth might be but a single truth -- but evaluators are certain not to find it. What they can find is multiple truths, multiple understandings, and some contradictory to others. Evaluators should seek to resolve the contradictions and misunderstandings but should expect that they will have to portray the multiple realities they find. (p. 19)

### ***Researcher as the Primary Instrument***

The process of conducting qualitative research depends upon a series of transformations. Qualitative researchers seek to understand the phenomenal world through the study of events, actions, talk, sounds, gestures, and interactions as well. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) characterize the interpretive nature of qualitative inquiry by saying, “Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (p. 3).

The first transformation involved creating representations of the phenomenal world through data generation, which was an “active, creative, and improvisational process” (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 91). In the field, the researcher conducted observations and interviews and gathered documents and artifacts that illuminate the phenomenon under study. Since the researcher’s perceptual acuity in observation and finely developed

capacity for eliciting detail from respondents are paramount, the concept of the researcher as instrument was prevalent in qualitative literature. This concept accentuates the distinctive function of the researcher's knowledge, perspective, and subjectivity in data acquisition.

A second transformation occurred when the raw data generated in the field was shaped into data records by the researcher. According to Graue and Walsh, these data records were produced through organizing and reconstructing the researcher's notes and transcribing audio and video recordings in the form of permanent records that serve as the "evidentiary warrants" of the generated data (p. 142). The researcher strived to capture aspects of the phenomenal world with fidelity by selecting salient aspects to incorporate into the data record.

Working with the data records lead to a third transformation in which the researcher analyzed the data, developed descriptive codes for patterns in the data, and inductively generated larger themes that emerged from iterative passes through the records. These transformations also involved interpreting what the data meant and relating these interpretations to other sources of insight about the phenomena including findings from related research, conceptual literature, and common experience. Data analysis and interpretation was often intertwined and relied upon by the researcher's logic, artistry, imagination, clarity, and knowledge of the field under study. The final research report reflects primary evidence of the phenomenon interwoven with the researcher's reasoned interpretation of the phenomenon (Graue & Walsh, 1998).

## **Participants**

To thoroughly understand what is going on within the MISD educational programs for the students classified as DDD, the researcher conducted interviews with school leaders, counselors, teachers, and other professional staff; performed observations in the instructional settings and meetings; and collected documents and data. This assisted in gaining a rich understanding of how the programs are addressing the individual needs of the students classified as DDD from the staff's perspectives.

There is vast difference in convenience sampling, in which participants, who are available, happen to be chosen, and purposive sampling, in which the researcher uses a set criteria based on prior knowledge and experience to select the sample. Purposeful sampling is the dominant strategy in qualitative research. Purposeful sampling seeks information-rich cases which can be studied in depth (Patton, 1990). In purposeful sampling, participants are selected in conjunction with the research question and the researcher believes they may have relevant experiences as related to the topic of the study according to Patton (1990). The researcher purposely chose the participants in this study because they directly associate or instructionally work with the students classified as DDD on a daily basis. Clear criteria provided a basis for describing and defending purposeful samples (Gay & Arrison, 2003).

The research purpose was to truly understand the staff's thoughts and perceptions on the programs in place for the students classified as DDD. For example: Do the staff feel the educational programs and experiences currently in place challenge the students? Do they address the individual needs of these students? Are the programs and

experiences rewarding for the students? And, do they provide some sense of self worth or self-achievement for the students so future success in education is not out of reach? For this reason, the researcher purposely selected MISD staff members working in these programs.

### **Research Design and Data Collection**

For this study, the researcher served as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2002). Data collection consisted of individual staff interviews, observations, and document collection. Individual interviews with the high school and alternative campus school leaders, counselors, and teachers lasted for approximately one hour. The researcher wanted to gather information from these individuals that helped him see how they feel and view, and to understand their perceptions about the current programs in place for the students classified as DDD. All interviews were semi-structured in nature and were held at high school or alternative campus during school in an area designed by the high school administration.

To help focus the questions posed to the participants, the researcher drafted and used interview guides to focus questions that pertain to the different staff members in this research study. First, the researcher interviewed school leaders to gauge their understanding and thoughts about the educational programs in place for the students classified as DDD (Appendix A). Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that purposive sampling gives the researcher distinctive information on the subject studied or questions asked. Counselors were interviewed to develop an understanding about how they view their roles in educating these young men (Appendix B). Issues surrounding counseling,

scheduling, and training are areas the researcher wanted to address with the guidance office. A minimum of five teachers who directly instruct the students classified as DDD at the high school and alternative campus were interviewed and observed at least twice (Appendix C).

Questions for the interviews were designed with the intent of gaining the participants perspectives, in relation to the nature and quality of the educational experiences provided by the high school and alternative school for the students classified as DDD, that would give the researcher a picture of the educational programs in place for the students classified as DDD. As the interviews unfold and more pertinent information was extracted from the participants, the picture became more focused and clear with key themes starting to emerge. All interviews were audio taped and field notes were collected throughout. Audiotapes were transcribed and all field notes were thoroughly analyzed immediately following each interview so the researcher had time to identify any common themes or patterns that started to emerge as data was collected. Field researchers rely most heavily on the use of field notes, which are running descriptions of settings, people, activities, and sounds, (Lofland & Lofland, 1984).

After analyzing the data from the first interview, a second interview was scheduled with the participants if clarity issues or questions arise. Follow up interviews with school leaders, counselors, or teachers became more focused on particular themes cataloged from the first interview. Questions became more directed to target themes or topics, which arose during the initial interviews.

Secondly, observations were conducted in the classrooms to gauge the manner, in which the teachers work with the students individually. The researcher conducted observations in two to three classrooms during the first visit (Appendix D). Upon the second visit to the school, the researcher observed two to three different classrooms, all serving the DDD students (Appendix E). The ability to gather firsthand eyewitness information about everyday functions within the research environment helped to answer the question; “What’s going on here” (Schwandt, 2007)? The researcher analyzed how staff members interact, instruct, cooperate, lead, and ultimately treat and challenge these unique students classified as DDD. Also, throughout the observation process, the researcher kept detailed field notes that were analyzed and cataloged after each observation (Appendix F).

Observations occurred on two different occasions within the instructional classroom setting. Observations can lead to deeper understandings than interviews alone, as it helps to provide context, and enables the researcher to see and hear things he may otherwise not have heard or seen (Patton, 1990). Observations in the classroom lasted approximately forty to sixty minutes. During this time, observations of how the staff interact and instruct their students were collected. Challenges presented by the instructional environment were also analyzed. In addition, staff behaviors and patterns were also observed. All observation field notes were collected by the researcher and analyzed as soon after the observations as possible. Furthermore, throughout both the interviews and the observations, it was the researcher’s intent for the participants to feel comfortable and at home in their own natural setting.

Finally, the researcher collected pertinent documents that added to the clarity of the research's purpose as well. These were documents related to the program but not documents about individual students or data on individual students. Document analysis, according to Schwant (2007) refers "broadly to various procedures involved in analyzing and interpreting data generated from the examination of documents and records relevant to a particular study" (75). Ultimately, it was the researcher's goal and purpose to understand the perceptions of the MISD staff members, those who work directly with the students classified as DDD, to ensure the educational programs equitably serve the students classified as DDD within MISD.

### **Data Analysis**

Bogdan and Biklen define qualitative data analysis as "working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others" (1982, p. 145). All data from the audiotapes and journal field notes were collected and transcribed. Data was stored in word format on a laptop computer. All data were stored as well on a flash drive owned by the researcher. Qualitative researchers tend to use inductive analysis of data, meaning that the critical themes emerge out of the data (Patton, 1990). Analysis begins with identification of the themes emerging from the raw data, a process sometimes referred to as "open coding" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Open coding was used to identify and tentatively name the conceptual categories into which the phenomena observed was grouped (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). All data was categorized and coded as collected. Coded categories or concepts were

derived from the data once themes or patterns had been identified (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The next stage of analysis-involved re-examination of the categories identified to determine how they are linked, a complex process sometimes called “axial coding” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The transcribed interviews were categorized and printed on index cards. The goal was to create descriptive, multi-dimensional categories, which form a preliminary framework for analysis. Words, phrases or events that appear to be similar can be grouped into the same category (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Categories or ideas that emerged from the data analysis were given code words (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Once code words had been assigned to the categories, emergent themes should started to appear to the researcher. In order to analyze the similarities and differences in the data a constant comparative analysis was utilized. Schwandt (2007) states:

Data in the form of field notes, observations, interviews, and the like are coded inductively, and then each segment of the data is taken in turn and (a) compared to one or more categories to determine its relevance and (b) compared with other segments of data similarly categorized. (p. 37)

Utilizing the constant comparative method helped identify similarities and differences in the different categories. Once the concepts emerged, the researcher began to create and produce a hypothesis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The categories identified in open coding were constantly compared and analyzed in new and different ways as the research started to develop the “big picture.”



## **Trustworthiness**

“How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to” is the enormous task faced by qualitative researchers when trying to prove trustworthiness in research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). Lincoln & Guba (1985) propose four “trustworthiness” criteria for qualitative research that include credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability.

Credibility refers to the confidence in the ‘truth’ of the findings. There are several techniques that help ensure credibility in research, which include: 1) prolonged engagement; 2) persistent observation; 3) triangulation; 4) peer debriefing; 5) negative case analysis; 6) referential adequacy; and 7) member checking. Spending sufficient time in the field to learn or understand the culture, social setting, or phenomenon of interest is referred to as prolonged engagement (Cohen, 2006). According to Cohen (2006) the researcher should be in the environment long enough to: 1) become oriented to the situation so that the context is appreciated and understood; 2) be able to detect and account for distortions that might be in the data; 3) be able to rise above his/her own preconceptions as the researcher; 4) be able to build trust with all who are involved in the research study. Lincoln & Guba (1985) add:

If the purpose of prolonged engagement is to render the inquirer open to the multiple influences – the mutual shapers and contextual factors – that impinge upon the phenomenon being studied, the purpose of persistent observation is to identify those characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued and focusing on them in detail. If

prolonged engagement provides scope, persistent observation provides depth. (p. 304)

When researchers use multiple data sources in an investigation to produce understanding this is referred to as triangulation, which helps to ensure credibility in research. Schwandt (2007) states:

Triangulation is a procedure used to establish the fact that the criterion of validity has been met. The fieldworker makes inferences from data, claiming that a particular set of data supports a particular definition, theme, assertion, hypothesis, or claim. Triangulation is a means of checking the integrity of the inferences one draws. It can involve the use of multiple data sources, multiple investigators, multiple theoretical perspectives, and/or multiple methods. The central point of the procedure is to examine a conclusion from more than one vantage point. (p. 298)

Qualitative researchers use the technique of triangulation to help ensure that an account is rich, robust, comprehensive, and well developed (Denzin, 1978). Denzin (1978) and Patton (1999) identify four types of triangulation: 1) methods triangulation – researchers use different data collection methods to produce findings; 2) triangulation of sources – different sources are collected using the same method; 3) analyst triangulation – researchers use multiple observers and analysts to review findings; and 4) theory triangulation – the researcher examines and interprets the data using multiple theoretical perspectives.

Consistent with analyst triangulation, another technique employed by qualitative researchers to ensure credibility is peer debriefing. Lincoln & Guba (1985) state, “It is a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer’s mind” (p. 308). Referential adequacy, the archiving of data, and negative or deviant case analysis, disregarding data that does not support the analysis, are two additional techniques sometimes used by researchers to enhance credibility. When the researcher uses members of those groups from whom the data were originally obtained, this is referred to as member checking. Member checking (Boyzatis, 1985; Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) throughout the collection of data is performed by: 1) the researcher pausing periodically to ask for clarification and summation of main points during the interview process, and 2) all interviewees will be allowed to read through the transcribed notes from the interviews to provide additional insight or clarification to enrich the data. Lincoln & Guba (1985) posit that this is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility. However, its worth is controversial. Providing respondents the opportunity to assess adequacy of data and preliminary results as well as to confirm particular aspects of the data helps ensure validity and merit for this particular technique (Creswell, 1998). Nonetheless, the process of member checking may lead to confusion rather than confirmation because participants may change their mind about an issue, the interview itself may have an impact on their original assessment, and new experiences may have intervened (Angen, 2000; Morse, 1994; Sandelowski, 1993).

The capability to generalize findings across different environments is labeled external validity. To achieve external validity, the researcher must provide thick descriptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By describing a phenomenon in great detail, one can begin to evaluate whether conclusions can be transferred across times, settings, situations, and people. Transferability refers to the degree that the researcher's working hypothesis about one circumstance applies to another and another. The researcher's responsibility is to simply provide enough detail to allow thick descriptions to be formulated by others so they can assess to see if generalizations can be made across times, settings, situations, and people to permit conclusions to be made. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that generalizability is "an appealing concept" since it gives the appearance of regulation and prediction over different circumstances (p. 110). However, generalizations across different circumstances cannot be ascertained if the presence of unique, local surroundings becomes too thick in detail. Transferability to other circumstances is dependent upon the connections between the original environment and the environment to which it is transferred. Researchers can only provide sufficient detailed information so that others can use this detail in new environments and contexts to draw new conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

To address the issue of dependability, Kirk and Miller (1986) discuss three types of reliability in conventional research, which correlate to: 1) the extent to which a measurement, performed repeatedly, stays constant; 2) the stability of a measurement over time; and 3) the likeness of measurements within a certain time period. Kirk and Miller (1986) add, "Issues of reliability have received little attention" and instead

qualitative researchers have focused on achieving validity (p. 42). Lincoln and Guba (1985) address the notion of an unbalanced focus on validity and reliability by stating, “Since there can be no validity without reliability (and thus no credibility without dependability), a demonstration of the former is sufficient to establish the latter” (p. 316). One technique addressed by Lincoln and Guba to help ensure dependability in research is conducting external audits. The purpose of an external audit is to allow a researcher not involved in the process the opportunity to evaluate accuracy and at the same time, evaluate whether or not the findings, interpretations, and conclusions are supported by the data (Creswell, 1998).

The fourth and final criteria Lincoln & Guba (1985) discuss is conformability, which refers to the degree to which others can support the evidence and conclusions developed by the researcher, from the processes, methods, data, and findings that result from the research process. To increase the level of conformability in research, researchers can employ the use of an audit trail. An audit trail is a rich description that remains transparent throughout the entire research project. Each step is described in detail from the start of the research project to the development and reporting of findings, (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985)) cite Halpern’s (1983) categories for reporting information when developing an audit trail: 1) raw data; 2) data reduction and analysis products; 3) data reconstruction and synthesis products; 4) process notes; 5) materials relating to intentions and dispositions; 6) instrument development information (p. 319-321).

Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, and Steinmetz (1991) conclude:

Being trustworthy as a qualitative researcher means at the least that the processes of the research are carried out fairly, that the products represent as closely as possible the experiences of the people who are studies. The entire endeavor must be grounded in ethical principles about how data are collected and analyzed, how one's own assumptions and conclusions are checked, how participants are involved and how results are communicated. Trustworthiness is more than a set of procedures. To my mind, it is a personal belief system that shapes the procedures in process. (p. 93)

The processes and standards for trustworthy research are constantly being refined and discussed. The ability to conduct a research project that is proven and comprehensible to others is a continuous task for qualitative researchers.

The researcher conducted all interviews and observations as well as develop all interview questions to thoroughly complete this qualitative study. Appropriate ethical manners were used by the researcher to gain access to the research site and to the staff members selected to participate in this qualitative study. All ethical and confidentiality requirements were strictly adhered to throughout the entire process. To ensure trustworthiness was accomplished during this study, the researchers used four different measures, which include: 1) prolonged engagement; 2) member checking; 3) external audits; 4) audit trail. These four measures were chosen by the researcher because: 1) he believes to truly understand the perceptions of the staff members who directly work with the DDD students he needed to immerse himself into the environment; 2) in an effort to make sure he understands the staff members correctly and what they did or said he

wanted to allow them time to review all interviews and transcriptions to make sure the data had been recorded accurately; 3) to help control biases and cover any avenues potentially left out by the researcher, an external researcher was used to help bring about a more thorough study complete in detail and accuracy; and finally, 4) keeping accurate records helped the researcher pull pertinent data or recordings when necessary as new and informational data or questions surface throughout the entire research process.

### **My Racial and Gender Positionality**

It is essential to disclose to the reader the lens of the researcher. I am a White doctoral student in his early thirties who has worked in public education for over eleven years. I was raised in a middle class country home in rural central Texas. I was fortunate to have three brothers, a mother and father throughout my childhood. I received my formal education in Main, Texas, which is a 3A school district. Main ISD is a very diverse district with a high percentage of economically disadvantaged students, and thus a title one school. During this time, I interacted and participated in extra-curricular sports with many young men from different cultures. My post-secondary education includes both junior college and four-year college work at public institutions. While at the junior college level, I had the opportunity to play baseball and again was able to gain experience and knowledge through interacting with an array of individuals. Once I arrived at A&M, my exposure to those from other cultures became very limited.

Since graduating from college, I have spent eleven years in public education, five years as a teacher, and six as an administrator, all at schools with very diverse populations with a high economically disadvantaged percentage, i.e., title one school.

As a teacher in Caldwell and Bryan, I had the opportunity to work with a diverse population. Many of my students in both Caldwell and Bryan were at-risk. Once I arrived in Bryan as a teacher, I quickly realized I was in a different place. The students in Bryan had a harder shell, were more street smart, and at the time, it seemed to me they did not want guidance. However, I truly believe now it was in Bryan that I gained the most experience and learned how to best handle students. I had so many epiphanies, which helped me transform into a better educator and administrator. Now, I am in Coolidge, which is a small 1A rural school. Our demographics are roughly 50% Hispanic, 30% African American, and 20% Caucasian. Our socio-economic percentage is roughly 88%.

In both Bryan and in Coolidge, I have had the opportunity to work with a high percentage of at-risk students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. During this time, I have gained considerable experience in learning how to be interactive with a diverse population faced with many challenges. However, during this time, I was blinded to many inequities. Since joining the doctoral program at Texas A&M, my eyes and ears have become more observant and sensitive to inequities that were invisible to me earlier in my life. Although there is still work to be done and I can gain much more experience and knowledge, I believe my awareness of social injustices and inequities is much keener.

### **Summary**

The researcher's decision to utilize qualitative methods was thought about in detail. Strauss and Corbin (1990) claim that qualitative methods can be used to better



understand any phenomenon about which little is yet known. The researcher's task was to understand those involved in the research project so rich and thick descriptions could be made throughout the research process. Qualitative methods were used to gain new in-depth perspectives and information on issues surrounding the research study.

Throughout the research study, the researcher's ability to use qualitative methods helped capture the perspectives of the district staff members who work directly with the students classified as DDD. Research problems often addressed by qualitative research methods tend to be framed as open-ended questions that will support discovery of new information. The ability of qualitative data to more fully describe a phenomenon is an important consideration not only from the researcher's perspective, but from the reader's perspective as well. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain, "If you want people to understand better than they otherwise might, provide them information in the form in which they usually experience it" (p.120). Qualitative research reports, typically rich with detail and insights into participants' experiences of the world, "may be epistemologically in harmony with the reader's experience" (Stake, 1978, p. 5) and thus more meaningful.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of the professional staff (teachers, counselors, school leaders, and other professional staff) as to the nature and quality of the educational experiences provided by the high school and the alternative school. This chapter presents the data gathered from the various staff members who participated in this study, and who are directly involved with the students classified as DDD at the developmental center and high school within MISD. One-on-one interviews were conducted with participants, who shared their experiences and insights on the state of the educational programs currently in place at both campuses for the students classified as DDD. The interviews generated three major themes: 1) program culture, 2) staffing, and 3) curriculum and instruction. Each theme contained several subthemes.

The first theme, program culture, refers to the direction, purpose, and passion the school district as a whole has for the further development of the educational programs for the students classified as DDD. This theme describes how teachers, counselors and administrators, from their perspectives, fostered academic success of their students. Within the program culture theme, three subthemes emerged: 1) separate facilities, 2) reduced funding effects, and 3) communication and trust. The second theme, staffing, refers to how programs and services for the students classified as DDD are arranged

within Main ISD. Three subthemes emerged within this category: 1) teachers, 2) behavior support specialist, and 3) leadership. The last theme was curriculum and instruction, which examined the ability for the high school and the developmental center to provide and deliver quality instruction on a daily basis, based on sound research and enriched curriculum components. Four subthemes emerged within this category: 1) curriculum, 2) educational alignment, 3) professional development, and 4) student achievement.

Before the findings are outlined and reviewed, I feel it is important to communicate the context of the town, school district, high school, alternative campus, and participants. In addition, I will include other relevant information that will enhance the participants' perspectives in relation to the educational programs for the students classified as DDD.

## **Main**

Main's namesake comes from General Jose Antonio Main. General Main carried on a lifetime feud with the Mexican president/dictator, Lopez de Santa Anna. Main was a close friend of Sam Houston, Stephen F. Austin and other Texas revolutionists. Main and his American wife owned a large land grant in Limestone County, which included lands where the current town of Main is located. In the early twentieth century, oil and gas was discovered by several wildcatters within Main's boundaries. The oil and gas was discovered along a fault line that stretched from below Kosse, Texas to above Corsicana, Texas. All together there were several hundred wells drilled during this time. However, the area of heaviest production was called the Golden Lane, which was about

one-half mile wide and ran right along the fault. In 1921 the field yielded five million barrels, with the number increasing in 1922 to thirty five million. During this time in Main, there were over forty thousand people living in hotels, homes, shacks, and tents.

Currently, Main's population is around 10,000 residents. Many of Main's long standing residents who lived during the hay days are in their eighties or nineties, but most have already passed away. Many of these individuals and their direct descendants, who are now in their sixties or seventies, still envision Main as a predominantly European American blue-collar town. However, the current populations in Main speak to a more diversified community. Currently, the demographic breakdown in Main, Texas is: Whites 43%, African Americans 33%, and Hispanic 23%, with other representing 1%. Like much of the state, the biggest increase in population has been within the Hispanic population. Economically, Main's median household income in 2009 was \$36,295. In 2000 the median household income was \$22,785. The estimated median house value in 2009 was \$68,772 up from \$35,000 in 2000. The most common industries within Main, TX include: 1) construction 17%, 2) public administration 12%, 3) retail trade 12%, 4) other services, except public administration 9%, 5) educational services 9%, 6) manufacturing 8%, and 7) health care and social assistance 7%. Main's largest employer is the Main State Supported Living Center, with a payroll in excess of sixty-five million dollars. Educationally, 63% of the population twenty five and older in Main, Texas only has a high school diploma; 11% has a bachelor's degree; 5% has a graduate or professional degree.

Historically, Main has had a rich educational background across both the White and the African American cultures. Within both cultures, institutions of higher learning were present for the first half of the nineteenth century. Westminster College in Tehuacana, Texas, just five miles away was established in 1903 and served as a place for Whites to further their educational experiences. Westminster College operated until the early 1950s when the college was closed due to financial issues connected to the railroad closure between Hubbard and Main. That section was closed due to war efforts in the 1940s. In the early 1900s, a mere forty-one years after the end of the Civil War and slavery, there was little support, structure or funding for black education. During these days, White teachers from elsewhere came to Limestone County, as well as other places in the South, and taught the newly freed slaves. After a while, the African American community worked together to create its own African American schools, usually built around churches, and eventually its own colleges. The St. Paul Normal and Industrial Institute began as an idea in 1906 in the minds of some Primitive Baptist Church members. Beginning in the 1920s and on through the 1950s, men and women of vision, who valued education and knew it was the key to a prosperous future, worked together to raise the money needed to build and eventually open and run this school that taught and trained black men and women. Unfortunately, even though Main generated a lot of revenue in the oil and gas industry during the roaring twenties (City of Main, 2011), the powers that be did not take the appropriate steps to ensure two higher institutions of learning remained as permanent structures in Limestone County. Both Westminster

College in Tehuacana and the St. Paul Normal and Industrial Institute in Main closed their doors during the first half of the twentieth century due to funding related issues.

Currently, the Main Independent School District consists of 6 campuses over the 425 square miles that the district encompasses. There is 1 elementary school, 1 intermediate school, 1 junior high school, 1 high school, 1 alternative school, and 1 school known as the Developmental Center, which educates the students classified as DDD. Main Independent School District in Main, Texas has changed drastically over the last ten to twenty years with a surge in the Hispanic population. Presently, MISD has 2,132 students and 361 full time and part time employees. Main ISD's student population is comprised of 31% African American, 37.9% Hispanic, 27.1% European American, 1% Asian, and 3% Two or More Races. The district's economic disadvantaged population is 74.2%. 2.4% represents 54 students with disciplinary placements, and 54.5% represents 1,163 at-risk students. Currently, there are 15 African American full time educators (FTE), 12 Hispanic FTEs, and 137 White FTEs working within Main ISD. The average years experience for teachers in Main ISD IS 8.9 with a teacher turnover rate of 23.3%. Beginning salary for a teacher in Main ISD is \$36,000. Main ISD's adopted tax rate is \$1.04 with an interest and sinking fund of \$.57. Actual financial totals for 2010-2011 include: 1) total revenue \$16,963,687, and 2) total expenditures \$17,570,156 with a per student expenditure equaling \$7,672. Academically, MISD has experienced trouble over the last few years keeping up with the rising state and federal accountability standards. Each year, each school district in the State of Texas is evaluated by both the state and federal government for student

achievement results on standardized assessments. MISD has experienced trouble elevating some of its sub-populations to above state developed accountability measures. To date, MISD has three unacceptable campuses due to below standard scores within some of these sub-populations (Texas Education Agency, Lonestar, 2011).

### **Participants**

Initially, a purposeful sample of staff members including administrators, counselors, and teachers were chosen to participate in this study. Participants were purposively chosen because they directly serve the students classified as DDD in an educational manner. Participants included: 1) two administrators, 2) two counselors, and 3) six teachers all who work directly with the students classified as DDD on either the high school or alternative campus and who come from different backgrounds.

The administrators who participated in the study both have been with the district for several years, one having served over twenty years in the district. The administrators began their careers as teachers, one serving as a Science teacher with coaching duties attached and the other as a high school Ag teacher. Mr. Moody, principal of Main High School, graduated from Teague High School and continued his education at Sam Houston State University with a BS in Kinesiology and a minor in General Business. He finished his teaching certification in May 1993 and a week later went to work for the BNSF Railroad. Eight years later, Mr. Moody accepted a teaching/coaching position at Teague High School and was there for 4 years. In the summer of 2005, Mr. Moody was named the assistant principal at MJH and in the spring of 2006 was then named principal of Main Junior High School. He was fortunate to be the principal there for six years. In

the spring of 2011, Mr. Moody was named the principal at Main High School and currently holds that position. Mr. Moody also has a Master's in Education from Stephen F. Austin State University, principal certification, and superintendent certification. Mr. Gregory is Director of Alternative Programs. Mr. Gregory is very laid back and seems to be polished politically. Conversely, Mr. Moody appears to be more driven, purposeful, and less concerned with the art of being tactful. Both administrators, within their own domains, appear to care for their students and want what is best for them.

Two individuals were selected to participate in the study that perform counselor related tasks for the students classified as DDD on both the high school and alternative campus. One has extensive knowledge and experience working with special populations while the other is fairly new in her role, but has been in education for over twenty years. Ms. Hill has a M.Ed. from University of North Texas. Ms. Hill is also a Licensed Professional Counselor. She worked at MSSLC for four years in the community services department upon graduating from college. Ms. Hill served at the state school in the following positions: Duty Officer for Ellis and Navarro Counties, QMRP, and Assistant Director of the HCS program. She worked as a Workforce Development Counselor for the Texas Youth Commission Corsicana Residential Treatment Center for eight years. This was in the education department. At that time TYC did not have school counselors. All the youths at that facility were diagnosed with a mental illness. Some also were diagnosed with Mental Retardation. Many were at the borderline intellectual functioning level and most received special education services. Ms. Hill's role was to support them in the educational process, teach social and coping skills, and



prepare them for post secondary employment and or education and training, while also serving on the site based committee and being involved with the ARD process. Ms. Hill worked for an additional year at Texas Youth Commission in Mart Texas as an Associate Psychologist before going to work at Main State Supported Living Center for almost two years as the Assistant Director of Psychology. Ms. Hill also was the Director of the STARS program there, which related to all specialized treatment services including groups for Sexual Offenders, Anger Management, Chemical Dependency, etc. She always carried a caseload in addition to her administrative duties on the Whiterock and Longhorn Units and provided psychological services to the individuals on her caseload. Ms. Hill officially started with Main ISD in 2009.

Mrs. Bell serves as the counselor at the high school for the students classified as DDD. Although counselor is not her official title, Mrs. Bell serves many of the functions that relate to counseling for the students classified as DDD. She has been in Main ISD for 21 years. All but this year have been on the Jr. High campus. Mrs. Bell has taught 6th grade Reading, English, Social Studies, as well as 7th grade English and Reading. Seven years ago, she changed to Special Ed. Inclusion. After a year, Mrs. Bell then became the Special Ed. Coordinator for the Jr. High and began doing all of the ARDS along with the related paperwork, while also helping with TAKS Testing Coordination. This year, Mrs. Bell moved to the High School to be the Special Ed. Coordinator for the High School where she conducts all of the ARDS and Special Ed. paperwork, CLASS Testing, and assists with TAKS/STAAR Testing Coordination.

The four teachers and one behavior support specialist who participated in the study come from an array of backgrounds and teaching experiences. The teachers are assigned to either the high school or the developmental center. Throughout the research process, the researcher was able to fully relate to the participants and understand their perspectives. Collectively they all really seem to care about their students and want what is best for them both now and in the future.

Mrs. Shields began working with children in 1997. Mrs. Shields's initial role with children was as a teacher at the First Methodist Preschool. According to Mrs. Shield, this is where she realized the value and joy of working with children and wanted to pursue becoming a public education teacher. Mrs. Shield worked at the First Methodist Preschool until October 2003, when she formally resigned to begin substituting for Main ISD. Mrs. Shield substituted continuously until the school year ended in 2003. At that time, she applied for a paraprofessional position at R.Q. Sims Intermediate School and began working there in August 2004. During that time, Mrs. Shield completed all requirements to become a teacher within the State of Texas. Mrs. Shield transitioned into a teaching role where she worked with 5th grade students. Her certifications are EC-4 and 4-8 Generalist and K-12 Special Education. She currently teach 6, 7, and 8th grade Math and Science. In the summer of 2009, Mrs. Shield began working at the developmental center and has been there now for going on three years.

Mrs. Andrews worked at the Main State School for 13 years in the Education Department. In 1987, a change in state law required that local districts start providing all educational related services for students within their attendance zones. Therefore, in

1987, Mrs. Andrews followed her students to Main ISD and began working with her students on Main ISD campuses. Mrs. Andrews has been working within the special education department for the past twenty-five years. In the early nineties when the MSSLC started receiving students classified as DDD, and MISD was required to offer educational services for these students, Mrs. Andrews began working with them on the high school campus as their mainstream teachers. All told, Mrs. Andrews has over twenty-six years experience working with special education students.

Mrs. Everman was born and raised in Main, Texas. Upon graduating from Main High School in 1985, she attended Baylor University in Waco, Texas. She graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Family and Consumer Sciences in December 1989. Having a desire to raise her children in a small town atmosphere similar to Main, Mrs. Everman moved with her family to Celina, Texas. Having worked part-time in Real Estate off-and-on over the years, she began working full-time as a Real Estate agent in Celina and also was President of the Greater Celina Chamber of Commerce. She also served on the Celina Main Street board fulfilling her interest of being involved with a small town community. After four years in Celina, Mrs. Everman and her family moved back to Main in 2010 in order to be closer to family. Main real estate was not faring well at that time due to the economy, so Mrs. Everman went back to school for her teaching certification in Family and Consumer Sciences, her college major. Fortunately, there was a position open on the Main ISD Alternative Campus working as a Family and Consumer Sciences teacher for the boys from the Main State Supported Living Center. In her classes, she teaches her Special Education students the very basics

of Food and Nutrition, Cooking, Fabrics and Sewing, Life Skills and Money Management. Mrs. Everman is currently in her second year as a Teacher with Main ISD. Since back in Main, she has also initiated a Recycling Program, which has the Main ISD and MSSLC campuses working together to help clean up Main.

Mrs. Goodman has been at the development center for three years now. She has taught in regular education classes as well as special education classes. Mrs. Goodman has been on several committees at the district level and the service center in Waco, TX that focus on behavior interventions. Mrs. Goodman has taught at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Miss Woods graduated from Main High School in 1989 and then attended Navarro College in 1989-1999 taking general education classes. Next, she graduated from California College of Health Sciences and received a certificate in Respiratory Therapy, EMT/EMT-I Certification in 2000. Miss Woods then graduated Cum Laude from The Criswell College in 2002 with a Bachelor of Arts in Biblical Studies/Christian Counseling. Miss. Wood's job history includes working as an assistant recreation director in two different nursing homes, as a nursing assistant and respiratory therapist, as a Child Protective Service Sub Care Caseworker –reunited children and families in foster care, and as a Child Protective Service Supervisor – supervised a staff of case workers reuniting children and families. She has attended behavior management classes through the University of Arizona and Region 12 Service Center to learn how to recognize and manage behaviors in children. Since working for Main ISD, Miss. Woods has been assigned to groups of students at MSSLC, the Developmental Center and Main

High School with the DDD students. Her responsibilities as Behavior Specialist include observing and monitoring student behaviors and implementing positive behavior supports to manage negative behaviors in the classroom. Also, Miss. Woods has assisted with teaching age appropriate coping and social skills. Miss. Woods has been able to implement positive behavior supports to reduce negative and disruptive behaviors allowing the students to remain in the classroom, which in turn allows for more instructional time. Currently, Miss. Woods serves on the Positive Behavior Support Team at Main High School that works with general education teachers to provide supports to reduce negative and disruptive behaviors in their classes.

### **Developmentally Delayed Delinquents**

Over the last fifteen years, the MSSLC has served students classified as DDD who have moderate to severe mental and emotional disabilities. These students have been committed to the MSSLC as a result of being charged with a criminal offense or have been found to have engaged in delinquent conduct constituting a criminal offense. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and 19 TAC 89.115, the local school district must provide these young men with a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). Over the last fifteen years, MISD has provided educational services to each student classified as DDD who is under twenty-two years of age and otherwise eligible under Section 25.001 to attend school in the district. Currently, there are a total of sixty-eight students classified as DDD at either the development center or the high school. There are sixty-one students currently receiving services at the development center. Twenty-two are White, thirty-one are African

American, and eight are Hispanic. They are all classified as special education students and they are all classified as economically disadvantaged. At the high school, there are seven students currently being served. Five are White, one is African American, and one is Hispanic. They also are all classified as both special education and economically disadvantaged students. Services and placement of the student classified as DDD have been determined by the resident's ARD committee consistent with federal law and regulations regarding the placement of students with disabilities in their LRE.

The overarching themes that emerged from the study have been delineated below. However, the subthemes are not completely mutually exclusive within each theme, as there inevitably is some overlap. Furthermore, the themes are interdependent with one another; therefore, the lines of categorization are sometimes blurred.

### **Program Culture**

Program culture refers to the purpose, vision, and climate of the school, to ideally nurture student learning and academic success. Factors such as faculty values, instructional capacity, academic rigor, leadership, communication, staff rapport with students, and high expectations are a few of the dynamics that play a daily part in fostering student success for the students classified as DDD. During the individual interviews, three subthemes emerged as identified by the participants. The subthemes within program culture are: 1) separate facilities, 2) reduced funding effects, and 3) communication and trust.

### ***Separate Facilities***

The current organizational structure positions the Director of Alternative Programs, and, therefore, the education of the students classified as DDD on the same tier with the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction. In this type of organizational model, special education is formally disconnected from curriculum and instruction and often promotes a perception that its primary mission is less about teaching and learning and more about disability, according to Riley, Frattura, Osborne, and Beer (2008). Such a separation of facilities for the students classified as DDD can cause deviation from the primary mission of a district, to educate all of its students. Riley et al. (2008) adds, “symbolically, that such a separation creates a cultural division that suggests special education stands differently or aside from general curriculum and instruction, which then perpetuates unintentional divisions within the mission and services supported by the school district” (p. 7).

The students classified as DDD are, for the most part, segregated from the general education setting onto a totally separate campus, which formerly served as the Main Junior High School. The students are educated in five different portable buildings with parts of the old gym serving as their vocational and recreational education classrooms. A portion of these same facilities also serves students who have been assigned to the district alternative education center and the district’s school of choice, which focuses on credit recovery.

The perceptions of several teachers and especially the special education coordinator at the high school, Mrs. Bell, supported the continuum of separate facilities

for the students classified as DDD. All mention behaviors to be the main reason to continue with the current educational arrangement of services. Mrs. Bell comments:

I truly believe the campuses need to be kept separate for lots of reasons. The first is discipline. Every ARD that I have attended for students who have not made it to the high school campus, the behavior is always discussed and issues such as Inappropriate Sexual Behavior and Unauthorized Departures are always a big problem. These problems can be handled appropriately on an alternate campus but it would be much more difficult on a general ed. campus. If they were all on the high school campus, I believe that their behaviors would manifest and be even worse. You would still need principals, counselors, teachers, etc. to handle these students. Our faculty cannot absorb all of this on top of the jobs they do now.

As a majority, the interviewees did not feel that some of the students classified as DDD can cope on a high school campus due to their severe cognitive or emotional disabilities.

Mrs. Bell further adds:

The students on the DC campus have not matured enough to handle being on a general ed. campus. The discipline issues that they deal with on that campus could not be tolerated on the high school campus and thus the students would end up in a lot more trouble. That is why I believe they should be on a separate campus.



Mrs. Andrews commented:

I do not feel we could serve all of the students classified as DDD on the high school campus due to some of the more serious behaviors exhibited by some. So, I feel the students are better served at the development center for the most part.

The perception of all those interviewed was one of caution when discussing the elimination of separate facilities because of the more severe frequent behaviors exhibited by some of the students classified as DDD. Mrs. Goodman comments:

Some of the students exhibit very serious sexual and aggressive behaviors, which have the potential to cause serious disciplinary issues. I believe their separation from the high school is warranted due to some of the frequent behaviors exhibited by some.

As a general perception, most felt very strongly about keeping the students classified as DDD segregated to another facility. During the time the researcher was observing at both the high school campus and the development center campus, he did not witness any uncontrollable behaviors exhibited by any student.

The researcher received the impression from most interviewed that separate facilities for the students classified as DDD was supported because of the serious behavior patterns perceived by staff that some students exhibit on a frequent basis. Accordingly, safety was commonly mentioned during the interviews as one of their biggest fears with the elimination of separate facilities. Consequently, perceptions received by the researcher from the participants supported the finding that most believe

the separation of facilities for the majority of the students classified as DDD was still very much warranted.

### ***Reduced Funding Effects***

At the state level, funding has been significantly cut. Almost four billion dollars has been cut from the state educational budget. This has caused a huge ripple across the state leading to several lawsuits being filed. The subtheme, funding, seems to affect every aspect of the educational programs in place for the students classified as DDD. According to Smith (2011):

Legal wrangling over school finance tends to hinge on three issues: equity, adequacy and what's called 'meaningful discretion.' The Texas Constitution, like those of other states, requires that the state provide efficient and adequate funding for its public schools. It also says that school districts must have discretion in how they spend the money they receive from property taxes. (p. 2)

With the reduction in funding that occurred this year, school districts are finding it very hard to provide equitable programs and services for their students. School districts have to focus on the needs and not the wants.

According to participants at each level within the organization, funding seemed to affect what and why they can or cannot do, get, or achieve for the students. Currently, in Main ISD like many parts of the State of Texas, revenue funding for the district has taken a significant hit due to cutbacks during the 2011 legislative session. Districts now have less money for students than they had before because of the cuts coming from the 82<sup>nd</sup> legislative session, but the academic standards correlated with accountability

measures at both the state and federal level continue to rise, according to Smith (2011). Funding cuts have caused reductions in staffing, curriculum resources, instructional materials and manipulatives, and professional development training for the administrative and instructional staff at both the alternative campus and the high school.

Mr. Moody comments:

The main thing that the lack of funding has affected would be the loss of teaching positions. We really have to defend each position each time we need to refill one. Most cases, if someone leaves we do not fill the position in the district. Over the last few years the district has used attrition to reduce the number of teaching slots at each campus. With the way things are looking financially, it will become even harder for us to maintain our current staffing numbers at the high school.

In a discussion with Mrs. Everman, Mrs. Shields, Mrs. Goodman, and Mrs. Hill, it was revealed that there are eight full-time teachers at the developmental center, but only three behavioral support specialists. The original organizational model for the developmental center called for each classroom teacher to have a behavior support specialist present in the room, according to the director. Behavior support specialists serve as aides within the classroom that help control often times uncontrollable behaviors exhibited by the students classified as DDD because of either their emotional or learning disabilities. During an observation at the high school, the research saw how important it was to have a BSS present in the classroom. Miss Wood's helped with instruction and the redirection of one of the students classified as DDD on more than one occasion. According to Mrs. Everman, "Having more BSS staff would help so that there

would be more trained personnel on hand in the classroom to supervise/control the behavior problems that arise. Due to the lack of funding, the district has been unable to hire more behavior support specialists.” One effect of reduced funding from the State of Texas has been the hiring freeze enacted by the MISD board of trustees. For the last two years, MISD has used attrition to eliminate positions and frozen salaries to try and offset reduced revenues from the state. This has directly impacted the need teachers have for more behavior support specialists. While observing in the classroom, the researcher could see the difference having a behavior specialist present makes in the instructional environment.

Most of the students classified as DDD are mild in nature, mostly needing attention from the instructional staff. However, there are some that pose serious threats to themselves, others, and the instructional staff, which warrants the need for more behaviors specialists to be in the classroom to aid the teacher when needed. Mrs. Shields comments:

I would love to see a BSS within every classroom if funding were available.

This would benefit not only the teachers, but the students as well.

Mrs. Goodman further commented:

With added behavior specialists, there would be much less of an opportunity for problems to arise. However, to employ more behavior specialists, the district would need more funding. The lack of funding is directly hurting the instructional arrangement at the development center.

The effect of reduced funding has caused teachers at the developmental center to serve as both instructor and behavior specialist in environments with students who, in most cases, are intellectually disabled and pose many challenges. The lack of funding has also drastically reduced the amount each teacher has to purchase instructional components and manipulatives. Mrs. Everman explains:

I had over twelve thousand dollars to spend within my career and technology budget my first year, but I did not receive a budget in year 2010-2011; I was told to make out a wish list by the director, and we will see what we can do for you.

Mrs. Goodman adds further:

There just are no extra funds to go out and buy extra materials or supplies for the students. I pull and borrow from many sources in order to meet the needs of my students.

Indirectly, the researcher was able to uncover that several of the teachers at the developmental center use their own money to absorb needs and provide for their students.

The instructional staffs at both campuses are willing to do this for their students because they truly care for them. The researcher could feel their passion and willingness to try and help or get what is needed to meet their students' needs. Mrs. Everman stated:

Funding is limited for our campus. There are Special Ed funds out there. I don't think that there are enough to support what we are trying to accomplish here on our campus. The Ag class and my Family and Consumer Sciences class need

materials to work with for our projects. I have bought a few things out of my own pocket. Being a new teacher - I am cautious of spending my own money. When asked by the researcher what his main challenge is as the director of alternative programs, Mr. Gregory simply but very directly replied:

Funding. We need more funds to hire more behavior specialists, to conduct more training for our staff, to find and purchase more supplies and curriculum resources for our teachers that directly meet the variety of needs our learners present. We need more funding to get me help. I am stretched too thin. The lack of funding—that is our biggest challenge.

Funding, from the viewpoint of most involved within this study, was the most significant variable limiting the programs currently in place for the students classified as DDD.

The lack of funding across the State of Texas has significantly hurt many school districts and many educational programs. However, when dealing with students who are intellectually disabled and who have moderate to severe behavior patterns, a lack of funding can cause serious problems for everyone involved. If adequate staffing and instructional components are not present, engagement is lost, which means disruptions begin to occur and unsafe situations follow.

### ***Communication and Trust***

Hoyle (2002) states: “Reliable information is becoming more difficult to identify, but individuals who communicate the right information and use it for the common good will be the power brokers of this century” (p. 32). Simply put, effective communication is key to any organization’s success. However, from information

gathered during the interviews, there seems to be communication problems associated with several different facets of the educational program in place for the students classified as DDD.

#### *Communication Between Central Office and the Campuses*

According to the developmental center's director, there seems to be a lack of communication between the central office and the alternative center. Meaning, there seems to be no purpose, vision, or established direction communicated to the director or his staff coming from central office. According to one participant, until the center was classified as Academically Unacceptable by the State of Texas there was no campus improvement plan or model in place at the developmental center. The instructional staffs at both the developmental center and the high school appeared to be doing their own thing, measuring student progress in their own ways without any direction from central office and the special education director. From the interviews, the researcher was lead to infer there was very little connectivity between the central office and the educational program in place for the students classified as DDD. Mr. Gregory, director at the developmental center commented:

Communication is one of the most severe weaknesses at the center. Better communication with the central office would help address the needs of the center. Especially, the need to obtain more funding to enable the center to function more efficiently. We just need better communication.

The researcher could feel the level of frustration coming from the director. Due to the special programs the director is running along with both federal and state laws he must

ensure are followed each and every day, open communication between the director and central office is key for the educational programs and the district.

Mr. Gregory also asserted:

At times, district level staff did not get the right kind of information to me so I could make decisions.

In the quote directly above, the director was referring to the special education director's inability to get him accurate budgetary information so he could try and address key issues at the development center. Nevertheless, the director seemed extremely stressed and stretched thin due to the many challenges presented by the three programs he runs on a daily basis.

#### *Communication Between the Developmental Center and the High School*

The educational programs in place for the students classified as DDD at the developmental center had little collaboration with the high school except when the high school teacher came over for ARDs. Communication between the two campuses was minimal at best. Several of the participants mentioned they would like to have better communication with the other campus. However, most did not really seem to understand why effective communication would ultimately reinforce the educational programs in place for the students classified as DDD. Mrs. Shields comments:

Communication with the high school is fairly non-existent and really isn't necessary once the boys leave the DC and go there. They are no longer my students.



There really seemed to be a sense of detachment on both campuses. Neither campus seemed to be very concerned about this detachment, nor about how it might be affecting the programs or students.

Good communication is hard work under the best of circumstances. Marriages, friendships, teams, corporations, and other organizations fall apart and battles are lost when communication fails, according to Hoyle (2002). According to the teachers at both the developmental campus and the high school, there seemed to be no aligned direction and purpose for the students classified as DDD between the two campuses within Main ISD. When the researcher asked about planning, preparation, the ARD process, and development of individual IEPs, the instructional staff at the developmental center mentioned there was very little collaboration between the two campuses. Mrs. Everman commented:

I never meet with the high school teachers about planning, instruction, and assessments or even just to discuss our students. It is like we are here doing our thing and they are there doing their thing. There is very little connectivity or communication with the high school.

Mrs. Shields added:

I do not communicate much with the high school.

Mrs. Andrews at the high school further stated:

I do not communicate as much as we used to or as much as I would like. We rarely see each other and rarely communicate. I communicate more with the behavior support group because I see them when they bring the students from the

developmental center to lunch here at the high school. They will ask how a student is doing and how they are progressing.

One teacher mentioned, there is a high school teacher sent over for ARDS at the developmental center, but there is very little collaboration before, during, and after this process regarding the individual students classified as DDD. Mrs. Andrews explained:

I receive the information via our Sp. Ed. Coordinator about upcoming ARDs.

We receive information only during the ARDs and as you can testify, sometimes there are questions that are not answered sufficiently or some questions are not asked at all (on my part). It is difficult to get information regarding student's levels and work samples. It is also difficult to get paperwork, documents and grades. You would think that the grades would transfer from campus to campus, but no. I talk with the teacher representative at the ARD, but seldom after transition.

Mrs. Andrews, more than any other participant, really seemed to want to communicate with those at the developmental center. She seemed to understand how open collaboration and communication will directly benefit the students.

On the other hand, Mrs. Hill, the DC counselor, tries to maintain a close connection with her students after they have transitioned to the high school. Mrs. Hill said:

In most cases, if a student received counseling services from me here, I will continue to provide the counseling once they reintegrate to another campus for continuity. In those cases, I visit their classrooms also and consult as needed

with teachers, paraprofessionals, and behavior specialist. I will then continue to attend such student's ARDs.

Mrs. Hill perceives there is more collaboration in place than most other participants by commenting:

We always have a general education teacher here for every ARD. If it is a high school student, it is a teacher from the high school. If junior high, the teacher comes from the junior high. The general education teacher can give us any input about how the services would be provided in their setting, classes offered, scheduling, etc. It also gives them an idea of how a student is doing, what supports and services he needs, what his IEP goals are, etc., which helps them plan for when the student comes to their campus. When a student reintegrates from the developmental center to the high school or junior high campus, we have an ARD to discuss it so the receiving campus is aware of what the student's strengths and needs are and what his special education services look like so that it is a smoother transition for the student. In addition, teachers from there could contact us if needed once the student is in their class for information.

According to Mrs. Hill, the two campuses have a good working relationship with each other to support the success of their students as they move to an LRE.

The separation of services for the students classified as DDD has caused a communication issue that is hindering the purpose of the educational program in place for the students classified as DDD. Services for the students classified as DDD are not aligned with their age appropriate nondisabled peers. It appears from the interviews that

neither campus knows what the other one is planning nor carrying out for the students classified as DDD.

#### *Communication Between Director and Staff*

Consistent collaboration between the instructional staff and the director at the developmental center seemed strained. Both the director himself and the staff feel he is stretched too thin, which effects his ability to interact with them on a daily basis. The director spends a lot of time in ARD meetings and transitioning between the three different alternative programs: 1) The School of Choice, 2) The District Alternative Campus, and 3) the Developmental Center for the students classified as DDD. Mr. Gregory confirmed these observations when he said,

Having to juggle three different programs all at once greatly hinders my ability to work closely with the instructional staff at the developmental center to make sure the students individual needs are met daily.”

The instructional staff did not seem distant from or distraught with the director, but they seem to agree that he is stretched too thin. During our discussion, the director mentioned,

I would like to be able to meet, observe, and visit with my staff on a more regular basis to help implement and improve upon positive behavior supports within the classroom, but my schedule just will not allow this to happen on a consistent basis.”

During the interview, the researcher noted that the frustration in the voice of the director was palpable. He truly seemed to be going in all different directions. While conducting

an observation at the DC, the researcher was finishing up one observation and heading to the room next door to conduct another observation. Upon entering the room, he found that the teacher was not present, but was absent. The teacher who's observation the researcher just completed, which is the cooperating teacher to the one absent did not know about the absence. This further illustrated that there appears to be a communication issue at the DC between the director and his staff. Dissemination of key information does not seem to be occurring.

Most alarming, there seemed to be some kind of trust issue that is hindering the ability of the high school and the developmental center to work together within the administrative offices. During interviews with both administrators, the researcher sensed an underlying tension between the two administrators. Analyzing various comments and observing the body language of the two subjects when questions were asked by the researcher, seemed to indicate that a power struggle is going on between the two that is hindering the program. The researcher could not put his finger on the exact problem, but determining who is in charge or who gets to make the decision regarding placement of the students classified as DDD seemed to be an issue. Mr. Moody commented:

When discussing student placement, I want to have final say on when I can send them back to the development center if they become behavior programs at the high school. I do not want that decision dictated to me by someone else.

Most importantly, the researcher received the impression from both administrators that trust might be an issue and that effective communication is not happening consistently.

Arrian (1998) found that “most fired executives are poor communicators and that it is safe to assume that the problems encountered at work are mostly communicative, not substantive” (p. 2).

## **Staffing**

The second major theme is staffing. Within Main ISD, programs have been set up using a predominately traditional model tailored to educate the “normed-group” of students at each campus. That is, supports are wrapped around a normed-group of students and, then, programs are developed in response to students who do not “fit” within the normed-group – perpetuating a deficit model, according to Riley et al. (2008). Traditionally, the normed-group of students in Main ISD is typically white, from middle- to upper-middle-class families, and academically successful. However, over the last ten to fifteen years, the majority of growth in student population has occurred in the Hispanic culture. The researcher understands that the Main ISD schools have enjoyed a very positive reputation over the years based on high academic standards, caring and qualified teachers, and special programs. However, according to Riley et al. (2008), changing demographics, federal and state legislation promoting accountability for the education of all students, requirements for highly qualified content-based teachers, and high standards for all students and sub-groups of students has forced the school district to more seriously consider how to best support and educate students who do not fit within the historical normed-group. There are three subthemes under this theme: 1) teachers, 2) behavior support specialist, and 3) leadership.

## ***Teachers***

Staff at the developmental center and high school seemed to truly care for the students classified as DDD. As they explained to the researcher, they felt their assignment is more of a calling. Each teacher the researcher interviewed portrayed a sense of belonging, calmness, and emotional connection to their assignment. Mrs.

Andrews comments:

I have always worked with the quote unquote ‘problem child’ throughout my professional career. When I worked at the state school, I was given the ones with the most severe behavior. Over the years, I have discovered that these children just need someone who cares and will show them some type of respect as a human being. I have been able to connect with them and it is heart wrenching what some of them have endured during their short lives. However, even with that, children should have boundaries—Know what is acceptable and what is not. All children can learn and over the years, I have found that they want to learn, but do not want you to know what they do not know. It is very satisfying for me professionally and personally when my students understand and grasp a concept I am trying to teach them.

Mrs. Anderson’s ability to work with her students is amazing. The researcher could tell during his observation that Mrs. Anderson has a personal relationship with her students. Her comfort level in the classroom was felt by, not only the students, but the researcher as well. One can just tell she has the knowledge and experience to work with this challenging population.

Mrs. Shields further adds:

First of all, I love these boys. Most of them show so much excitement at school, which excites me. It definitely is a challenge some days due to behavior. I love my job and I don't plan on doing anything else. I think special education is where I'm meant to be. These boys need someone who cares about them and who believes in them. I feel like they can all be successful at something.

Mrs. Everman stated:

I love working with and interacting with the boys. They do pose challenges on a daily basis, but they have never really had a chance to do positive things. They come from tough environments and I find it fulfilling to work with them and see them accomplish things.

Mrs. Goodman further stated, "The boys are challenging, but I would rather work here than any other place. I have always enjoyed working with challenging students."

Unfortunately, under the current design, the teachers did not feel they are able to adequately accomplish what is needed for their students. The researcher could feel, due to their close relationship to their students, their frustration.

### ***Behavior Support Specialists***

There seems to be a common concern that more staff, in particular behavior support specialists, are needed to help eliminate behavior problems and patterns that exist within some of the classrooms and with some of the students. According to emergency reforms for Texas state supported living centers (SSLC) enacted in June of 2009, previously referred to as Senate Bill 643, a school district in which alleged



offender residents are enrolled should employ one or more Behavior Support Specialists (BSS) to serve the residents while at school. Behavior Support Specialists must: 1) hold a baccalaureate degree, 2) have training in providing to students positive behavioral support and intervention, and 3) meet any other requirements jointly determined by the Commissioner of Education & Commissioner of DADS. The BSS shall conduct a FBA for each student classified as DDD enrolled in the school district that includes: 1) data collection through interviews and observations, 2) data analysis, and 3) development of an individual BIP. The BSS ensures that each student classified as DDD is provided behavior management services under a school BIP based on the student's FBA and communicates and coordinates with the student's interdisciplinary team to ensure that behavior intervention actions are functioning.

From an instructional viewpoint, teachers mentioned in interviews that they do a lot of redirecting, refocusing, and adjusting because of behaviors that seem to permeate the instructional environment. Mr. Gregory comments:

I feel more BSS personnel are needed to allow the instructors to actually provide the content rich instruction needed for the students classified as DDD to excel.

One teacher in particular mentioned and showed the researcher a checklist used to make sure the students classified as DDD have taken care of basic hygiene issues before class can begin. Mrs. Everman commented:

It takes at least ten minutes each day, taking away valuable instructional time from both the teacher and students. My viewpoint is this should be addressed before the students even reach my classroom.

Having more BSS staff would help so that there would be more trained personnel on hand in the classroom to help supervise and control behavior problems that arise.

Behaviors in the classroom prevent the teacher from completing the lesson and prevent the other students from learning. Interrupted lessons due to behaviors are frustrating to the other students, as well as the instructor, and can cause all within the classroom walls to lose their train of thought, which can break down the learning cycle.

Throughout the interviews, the researcher got the feeling the students classified as DDD become distracted very easily, often times in both positive and negative ways. According to every teacher at the developmental center, this is where more behavior support specialists would tremendously increase their abilities to more effectively educate and challenge the students classified as DDD. Mrs. Shields comments:

Many times, we have so many different behavior issues arise at one time and not enough staff to assist. This means instruction stops to deal with the behavior. I would love to see a BSS within every classroom. This would benefit not only the teachers but the students as well.

Although the researcher did not observe any disruptive behaviors, he did notice during his observations that the students classified as DDD come in at all different times creating an instructional nightmare for the teachers. They have to begin, stop, and redirect during these many disruptions to the instructional environment. With the addition of more behavior support specialists, the teachers mentioned they would get to spend more time with the students working on instructional related activities and assignments instead of spending all their time redirecting or correcting behavior issues.

## ***Leadership***

Administratively, the developmental center director feels he is over-extended. This was also the perception of his staff who all stated he seems to be strained and does not get to interact with them much. Mr. Gregory stated:

Due to my ARD schedule and the different alternative programs, I seldom have time to work directly with my staff members on positive behaviors supports that would directly help the students classified as DDD with behavior related disturbances.

Saphier, Freedman, and Aschheim (2007) state: “Most principals do not have time or energy to provide the nurturing, support, and feedback that is essential to retaining both new and veteran teaches in today’s challenging school environments” (p. 17). Mr.

Gregory further adds:

Having the ability and time to work directly with my staff daily, to help plan and implement instruction, and then to effectively evaluate the instructional staff is something I feel strongly about, but simply do not have the time within my schedule to effectively accomplish this on a consistent basis.

Mr. Gregory continued by stating:

If extra help were present, I would have the time to implement more positive behavior elements into the curriculum and daily routines of the developmental center campus, which would work to eliminate some of the behavior problems experienced by the campus and staff.

However, this initiative has not gotten off the ground. The need for extra staff at the developmental center seemed to be a common thread of concern for every individual participating in this study who currently works at the center.

On the other hand, the high school principal Mr. Moody, who is in his first year, does not appear to truly understand the complexity or necessities of the program for the students classified as DDD. During the interview, it became apparent that Mr. Moody was not really equipped to answer some of the researcher's questions with depth and clarity. His answers were very short. Elaboration often spiraled into other facets of the organization, and he sometimes did not seem aware of what all was happening in the building. Having inherited a campus that is classified as Unacceptable by the Texas Education Agency and failed to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the second year in a row, the high school principal seemed to be trying to figure everything out with his new assignment; it will probably take time for him to truly understand the program for the students classified as DDD at the high school. However, Mr. Moody did comment.

If the program for transition was here and the staff and facilities would allow, I think it would be good to have the program centralized on one campus, which would allow for better alignment and utilization of district staffing and financial resources. The transition services for the students would be more fluent and the evaluation of the programs and instructional staff would be more consistent. Given the findings, it appeared some believe aligning educational programs would benefit the students and district as a whole. This would help reduce expensive costs

generated by operating additional facilities and employing additional personnel.

However, aligning the educational programs did not seem to be a very popular idea for discussion.

Educational aligned between the high school and the developmental center was not in place, given the findings. Current staffing levels are not in alignment with the model outlined in Senate Bill 643, calling for a BSS in each classroom to support instruction. In addition, the current leadership seemed to be very strained and stretched very thin.

### **Curriculum and Instruction**

The final over arching theme discovered by the researcher is curriculum and instruction. Curriculum is a complex idea containing multiple components including goals, content, pedagogy, and instructional practices, according to Hyson et al. (2007). Hyson et al. (2007) state further, “Curriculum should serve as a comprehensive guide for instruction and day-to-day interactions with all young children.” Further, enriched curriculums should recommend practices for: 1) promoting active engagement and learning, 2) individualizing and changing instructional practices for each individual based on good data, 3) provide rich opportunities for students to learn in consistent environments, and 4) collaboratively working together with professionals and families. Furthermore, changes to IDEA in 2004 require that all children, regardless of ability, have access to a quality education and have the opportunity, if warranted, to participate in the general curriculum and general setting, according to Hyson et al. (2007). Nevertheless, schools still find this a challenge, but why? There are four subthemes

within this themes including: 1) curriculum, 2) educational alignments, 3) professional development, and 4) student achievement.

### ***Curriculum***

Hyson et al. (2007) state: to benefit all children, including those with disabilities and developmental delays, it is important to implement an integrated, developmentally appropriate, universally designed curriculum framework that is flexible, comprehensive, and links to assessment and program evaluation activities. Most of the students classified as DDD cannot successfully perform at their current age appropriate grade level, so the curriculum and its instructional components need to be differentiated according to individual IEPs, as stated by several participants. Currently, C-Scope is the district curriculum, but according to the Mrs. Shields, C-scope does not differentiate for special education students. Mrs. Everman commented:

C-Scope does not have a curriculum database for Food and Consumer Science (FCS). I know that they are adding more and more curriculum all the time but FCS is not there yet. I spoke to the curriculum director and she confirmed that it should be there on C-Scope 'one day.' So, I make all my own lesson plans and use the BRIDGES book to get my TEKS and build lessons around them from that.

The instructional staff has to pull resources from various people and places, in order to differentiate and adjust all scope and sequence, preparation, instructional delivery, and assessments to meet the needs of their students. Mrs. Goodman further comments:

I have had many people ask around for materials - basically all the samples that were not adopted, garage sales, teachers retired and getting rid of their stuff, etc., along with asking the curriculum director to get me a copy of student textbooks on grade level. I do not have a curriculum other than C-Scope to use. I just have to hunt through my materials that I have collected through the 19 years from K-5 teaching all subjects to find materials to correlate with grade level expectations but yet on their functional level. That is nearly an impossible task because there is nothing and I mean NOTHING that has been developed that bridges the extreme gaps that we face and those gaps vary from student to student, grade level, and subject-to-subject.

Mrs. Shields further adds:

I use C-Scope, but because of the variety of different functional levels within my classroom, I teach at a much slower pace than they do. My students need more review and re-teach which slows us down and I have to take C-Scope and break it down to prerequisites on their functional levels. Having a curriculum that is designed to address this functional level would be very nice.

This requires enormous amounts of time, which the instructional staff expressed their willingness to accomplish, but wish they were able to find and purchase a better curriculum that addresses the individual needs of their learners more directly.

### ***Educational Alignment***

Educational programs should be connected according to both federal and state law, especially when discussing special education students. Educational programs for

the students classified as DDD should not be splintered or at alternative campuses. When one stops to think, even about the name alternative campus or developmental center it perpetuates a deficit view or way of thinking. The WEAC (2012) states:

It is critical that any district or building considering more inclusive practices take the time necessary to plan effectively. Attention to special education students and staff alone is only half a strategy. Planning should involve all stakeholders in researching, discussing and examining the entire educational program. Real inclusion involves restructuring of a school's entire program and requires constant assessment of practices and results. (p. 5)

During the interview process, the researcher got the impression from the teachers that aligning the instructional model on both the high school campus and the developmental center campus was not as important to some as others. The researcher never witness during observations teachers collaboratively planning or preparing instruction for the students classified as DDD. During the interview process, only one participant, Mrs. Andrews at the high school, mentioned the value or logic behind cooperative planning or aligning processes between campuses. It became very clear there was no district expectation for this type of alignment coming from the central office, the special education department or from either the high school principal or the director at the developmental center. Scheurich and Skrla (2003) state:

Consequently, what is needed is for a school, a district, or, better, a state to specify the expected curriculum standards for all subjects and all grades. Then, all teachers could know specifically what their students are expected to learn, in



terms of knowledge and skills, before entering a particular class, and what the students need to learn before they can pass on to the next teacher and class.

(p. 40)

When asked, some teachers did not feel that curriculum analysis, instructional planning, and instructional supports and resources should, in conjunction with non-special education students, be aligned with the students classified as DDD. For example, Mrs. Shields comments:

I don't believe the curriculum should be aligned with that at the high school. I use C-Scope, as I assume the teachers at the high school do, also but because of the variety of different functional levels within my classroom, I teach at a much slower pace than they do.

While the mandate from IDEA is not new, many school districts working with students with disabilities continue to struggle with understanding how to make each component of the mandate a reality according to Hyson et al. (2007). Generally, teachers at the high school level have the richest subject matter knowledge relating to their individual subject of choice. These educators know how to align, differentiate, and adjust curricular expectations to meet the needs of diverse populations because typically they have had the most content preparation during their post-secondary career.

However, the researcher received the perception during the interview process at the developmental center that the teachers do not really see a need to align with the high school. An accessible curriculum means that all aspects of the curriculum invite active participation of all students, regardless of disability or special need, which requires

effective planning and alignment with non-special education teachers according to Hyson et al. (2007). On the other hand, the teacher and the special education counselor at the high school felt it would be key to student success if planning, instructional strategies, and processes were aligned to make transitions for students easier and more successful. Mrs. Bell commented:

I believe that the DC and the high school need to be aligned as closely as possible on planning, instruction, etc., due to the fact that students transfer back and forth throughout the year. We receive students from the DC constantly. It may be at the beginning of each six weeks, at the middle, or at the end. As a matter of fact we have two coming in the next few weeks even this close to the end of the school year. If the two campuses were closely aligned then the students wouldn't miss a beat on instruction. As it is, their subjects may not be at the same spot in the curriculum and it takes a while to see where the student is and what needs to be accomplished. This is wasted instructional time that could better be used.

Mrs. Andrews further adds:

The students come to us at all times during the year and sometimes during an instructional period. It would be beneficial if there were some continuity with instructional strategies between the high school and the developmental center for both the students and the teachers.

Effective instructional planning is the most important piece of the puzzle for non-special education students and special education students to be successful within the

instructional model according to Mrs. Bailey, special education counselor at the high school.

Consequently, there does not seem to be much interest in planning collectively with the high school on the part of the teachers at the developmental center. When asked about the alignment of processes and instructional delivery, Mrs. Andrews felt that would be a good idea, but that was not the perception received from the staff at the developmental center. From the interviews, informal conversations, and observations, the researcher was lead to believe there is no or little educational alignment between the high school and the development center.

### ***Professional Development***

There is a growing consensus among educational reformers that quality professional development for teachers and administrators lies at the center of educational reform and instructional improvement, according to Elmore (1997). A school district's ability to provide quality professional development on a consistent basis that transforms instructional practices into equitable opportunities for all students is the key to student achievement. However, "a district or campuses vision of instructional improvement depends heavily on people being willing to take the initiative, risks, and responsibility for themselves, for students, and for each other" (Elmore, 1997, p. 19).

From information gathered by the researcher during interviews with teachers, counselors, and administrators professional development was occurring within the educational programs for the students classified as DDD. However, the researcher did not get the perception that professional development was happening on a consistent and

meaningful basis especially at the instructional level.

When asked about professional development by the researcher, the teachers mentioned several different types and styles of professional development that have been offered to them. Mrs. Shields commented:

We have had short trainings that covered key concepts from the *Capturing Kids' Hearts* program. We have also had short trainings at the beginning of the school year lead by the director, Mr. Gregory, where we discussed instructional practices and behavior supports. Also, faculty meetings occur on some Wednesdays at the developmental center. During these faculty meetings, various professional development topics are discussed by the director and counselor.

DC counselor Mrs. Hill mentioned:

I train on CPI's *Non-Violent Crisis Intervention* program. This includes how to recognize, prevent, and de-escalate a crisis situation and what to do after a crisis situation to support those involved. I include how to document behaviors and incidents in a professional, objective manner, positive behavior support instead of punitive discipline, and some trauma informed care with this. On the DC campus, all our teachers, paraprofessionals, security personnel, behavior specialists, and campus police officer are trained on this. The entire district received training on Randy Sprick's *Safe and Civil Schools* in August 2011. Also, teacher workdays are scattered throughout the calendar to allow teachers to work on instructional related tasks.

Mrs. Everman said, "We have had some training on *Capturing Kids' Hearts*." Mrs.

Andrews further added:

I would like to have more trainings on current curriculum components to help me better understand current methods so I can have a direct impact on student behaviors and achievement.

Most of the professional development offered by the district was focused on how to address inappropriate behaviors. There seems to be very little or no professional development offered for the teachers on how to effectively plan instruction that engages students.

Mrs. Goodman mentioned attending workshops at Region twelve in Waco, Texas and being part of a behavioral advisory team at Region twelve. During the interview Mrs. Goodman stated that “most professional development comes from trial and error or collegial support due to the fact that the teachers are working with unique individuals and there are just not a lot of organizational models out there that specialize in educational related services for students classified as DDD.” At the high school, Mrs. Andrews added to the discussion: “Professional development happens mostly at the beginning of the year and is handled locally by either individuals from central office or by the principal at the high school. Frequently, there might be faculty meetings to address particular issues, but this does not happen on a consistent basis.” Faculty meetings did come up both at the high school and at the developmental center. However, no one really remembered anything pertinent that was discussed or offered at these meetings.

Both the director and the counselor at the developmental center mentioned the need to incorporate more positive behavior support professional development for the instructional staff. When asked by the researcher what professional development would strengthen the educational programs for the student classified as DDD, Mr. Gregory mentioned:

We need more professional development in different and adequate instructional materials to use for the students classified as DDD, 2) we need more effective positive behavior supports in place, 3) we need professional development that will move us away from being a punitive model, and 4) we need trainings that will give us the skills to handle their behaviors more positively and not let those same behaviors become an obstacle to learning and student achievement.

Mr. Gregory seemed to feel very strongly about implementing more proactive measure to eliminate some of the inappropriate behaviors exhibited by some of the students classified as DDD. However, this has not been accomplished yet due to time constraints, according to the director.

There was a common perception among the staff at the developmental center that more professional development is needed in the areas of behavior management, effective communication, and curriculum. Nevertheless, there does not seem to be a purpose for the professional development that has been offered to the teachers. These findings support the contention that professional development was not being offered on a consistent or focused basis nor does there seem to be a real plan in place for offering quality professional development. These findings further support earlier findings related

to educational program alignment, staffing, and leadership, which are all directly related to and effect program culture.

### ***Student Achievement***

Educational reform is directed at measuring progress toward educational goals for all students served by the public education system. For the last decade, schools and students in Texas have been held accountable both at the federal and state level for how well they perform on state assessments. For the bulk of the time that TAKS has been operational in Texas, special education testing has not been calculated into the overall rating for a campus or district. However, in 2009 special education students on accommodated or modified assessments became operational. Even though there was a phase in process over two years 2008-2009 and 2009-2010, all student results became measured and included into the ratings. When students with disabilities are left out of the assessment process and the subsequent results data, they are also left out of any reform effort, according to Ysseldyke, Thurlow, McGrew, and Shriner (1994). Nevertheless, from the interviews, the researcher got the impression that state testing was not the best avenue for the students classified as DDD. The staff also mentioned that not having and using a set curriculum to address individual needs hinders their ability to measure improvement effectively and consistently.

When talking about student achievement, especially with the instructors at the developmental campus, the spectrum was very wide. Most of the instructors almost immediately start to talk about behavior improvements or achievement instead of academic achievement. Mrs. Goodman comments:

It is hard to teach a complete lesson on a daily basis because of the behavior issues that we have to address with the students. It seems like we are constantly redirecting the students to pay attention, which breaks down the lesson cycle.

This directly impacts our ability to measure or increase student achievement. Several of the instructional staff seemed very distraught when discussing academic student achievement. Mrs. Shields mentioned: “We try, but because of their behavior issues it is hard to make steady progress in academic gains or student achievement.” Mrs. Andrews further added: “Measuring student achievement with one test for these students is hard. I try to look at their progress in the classroom on a daily basis and gauge how they are progressing from lesson to lesson and unit to unit.” During observations (Appendices E, F), the researcher witnessed at both campuses, but especially at the developmental center campus, that distractions take place within the instructional environment, such as people walking into the classroom unannounced, telephone calls, and other teacher/ student interruptions. At the developmental center, the researcher was observing and the telephone rang four times during the class period. What was most alarming to the researcher was the teacher at the developmental center did not seem to mind that this was occurring, that learning was being stopped by outside interruptions.

While discussing standardized tests with the instructors at both campuses, most had the perception that this is not the right avenue for the students classified as DDD. Most felt the students classified as DDD would be better served receiving a more vocational related education. Mrs. Everman explained:



ALL these boys are not 2-year or even 4-year college material. Most don't have the funds or family support to go even if they wanted to. BUT they are capable of learning a blue-collar type trade if they were taught. I really feel strongly that they should be offered more trade skill options, such as metal shop, wood shop, car mechanics, landscaping, barber skills, plumbing skills, welding, culinary skills, etc. Also, I have found that most all of them are very artistic! They would really enjoy an art class. They have creative minds that are capable of doing these things.

Mrs. Goodman added: "It is unfair to ask some of our students to take these tests. Also, due to the federal cap, some are placed on tests they have no business taking. This is an injustice to the students." The students classified as DDD, per state law, are required to take one version of the TAKS assessment. Most of the students classified as DDD take either the TAKS-Alt, (the lowest version, which requires observation and analysis by staff members), or the TAKS-M, (same grade level curriculum, but the questioning and level of difficulty is much lower). According to Mrs. Hill:

Most of the students classified as DDD fall somewhere between TAKS-M and TAKS-Alt. Meaning, they are not at the TAKS-Alt level, which is designed for severe cognitive delays or disability, but they are also not on the level of TAKS-M, which is same grade level content as the sister assessments TAKS and TAKS-Accommodated with only modified questioning and design.

At the high school campus, Mrs. Andrews discussed briefly TAKS and the fact that some of the students classified as DDD had been successful on the state assessment.

Mrs. Bell concurred by giving specific student results:

A 10th grade student was at the high school last year for 9th grade testing, but the other 3 are recent transfers. The tenth grade student passed his Math, but did not pass his Reading assessment. The three eleventh grade students had the following results: 1) eleventh grader: (10th grade test) TAKS ALT - ELA: Passed, Math: Passed, Science: No Pass, Social Studies: Passed; 2) eleventh grader: (10th grade test) TAKS M - ELA: No scores available, Math: Passed, Science: No Pass, Social Studies: Passed; and the final eleventh grader did not have any scores. He was not in our district and his scores were not sent from his previous location.

Mrs. Andrews and Mrs. Bell both mentioned during their interviews that some of the students classified as DDD had performed well on the state assessments, but they could not give the researcher an exact number or percentage.

Throughout the interviews, several interpretations were given for student achievement. Some mentioned graduation, but were almost embarrassed that Main ISD was graduating individuals who could neither read nor write, some mentioned some academic progress, and finally, some mentioned behavior progress. However, there seemed to be no consensus among the staff at the developmental center as to what truly defines student achievement.

## **Summary**

This chapter presented three major themes that emerged throughout the study. The first theme, program culture, referred to the direction, purpose, and passion the

school district as a whole has for the further development of the educational programs for the students classified as DDD. This theme described how teachers, counselors and administrators fostered academic success of their students. Within the program culture theme, three subthemes emerged: 1) separate facilities, 2) reduced funding effects, and 3) communication and trust. The second theme, staffing, referred to how programs and services are set up to accept and educate the “normal” students, which has the potential to cause a disconnect or deficit view of thinking when considering how to plan and educate students with disabilities. Three subthemes emerged within this category: 1) teachers, 2) behavior support specialist, and 3) leadership. The last theme was curriculum and instruction, which examined the ability of the high school and the developmental center to provide and deliver quality instruction on a daily basis based on sound research and enriched curriculum components. Four subthemes emerged within this category: 1) curriculum, 2) educational alignment, 3) professional development, and 4) student achievement.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

This study examined the perceptions of the professional staff (teachers, counselors, school leaders, and other professional staff) as to the nature and quality of the educational experiences provided by the high school and the alternative school. Ultimately, it is the intent of this study to help ensure the educational programs in place are both equitable and challenging. Chapter five of this study concludes with a discussion of findings that highlights three major themes: 1) program culture, 2) staffing, and 3) curriculum and instruction discovered during the research study. Within each overarching theme there are subthemes that further develop a mental image of what is transpiring within the educational programs in Main ISD for the students classified as DDD. The implication of results follows by giving some meaning to why the themes and subthemes are currently present within the educational programs. Finally, future policy, practice, and potential research is suggested by the researcher to further develop and understand the educational programs currently in place for the students classified as DDD.

#### **Discussion of Results**

This study produced three fundamental themes, which emerged from interviewing and observing two district administrators, two counselors, and four

instructional teachers within Main ISD. The overarching themes included: program culture, staffing, and curriculum and instruction.

### ***Program Culture***

The first theme, program culture, refers to the direction, purpose, and passion the school district as a whole has for the further development of the educational programs for the students classified as DDD. The program culture theme produced three subthemes: 1) separation of facilities, 2) reduced funding effects, and 3) communication and trust as Table 1 illustrates.

Table 1 ***Theme 1: Program Culture***

<b>Subtheme</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Summary statement</b>
Separate Facilities	Negative	Formal disconnect
Reduced Funding Effects	Negative	Lack of funding
Communication & Trust	Negative	Breakdown

The first subtheme, separation of facilities, refers to the current organizational model in place for the students classified as DDD. This arrangement places their educational services at a separate facility location within the Main ISD. In this type of model, special education is formally disconnected from curriculum and instruction and often promotes a perception that its primary mission is less about teaching and learning and more about disability, according to Riley et al. (2008), thus producing a negative effect for the students classified as DDD. In addition, several laws established over the

last half-century helped to eliminate these kinds of negative effects for special education programs and students. For example, Walsh, Kemerer, and Maniotis (2005) assert, the four most notable established laws addressing SPED and accountability are: 1) Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), 2) Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, 3) Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1992 (IDEA), and 4) No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). Thus, the primary goal of special education, including within the law, is to work students toward inclusion in the general education setting, if at all possible (Kavale, 2002).

Furthermore, *Education World* (2012) stated that the landmark education of IDEA instituted in 1975 and amended in 1997 moved children with special needs from segregated classrooms into regular classrooms on general education campuses. Accordingly, Walsh et al. (2005) indicated that this allows the students to receive the same instructional and educational opportunities as other non-disabled peers. However, this does not appear to be in place for the students classified as DDD within Main ISD. The bulk of the students classified as DDD, currently, are being educated in the most controlled environment. Chen (2009) states, the most controlled environment is the self-contained classroom, while Dunn (1968) suggests that self-contained schools and classrooms were initially created to transfer “misfits” out of the general educational setting. This educational setting typically serves students with mild to severe cognitive delays that generally have a classification of intellectual disability (Walsh et al., 2005). Although students classified as DDD are not controlled in one classroom and are allowed to attend a vocational education class and a physical education class, they are at

a separate facility within Main ISD. Given this research study, the recommendation of experts discussed above, and the law, further efforts should be taken that would see more of the students classified as DDD within less restrictive environments. There are many instructional arrangements and plans that could be created to allow this to happen. Dunn (1968) asserts, “[W]e must stop segregating them by placing them into our allegedly special program” (p. 6). As one example of how this might work, Hale (2011) explains that allowing SPED students to attend mainstream classes can give the ARD committee the time and data they need to reassess the student’s IEP. Once this has occurred, the ARD committee can make more accurate decisions and changes may be made to the student’s IEP, enabling the student to have a more rewarding educational experience (IDEA, 2004). The opportunity for a disabled student to receive instruction in a general education setting helps to boost the student’s self esteem, confidence, and self-efficacy, according to Kavale (2002). Furthermore, given the study findings, most participants involved feel separate facilities and services better serves this challenging population. Neither Main ISD nor its leadership seems to view separate facilities and services as a problem for the students classified as DDD. As a result, the current educational arrangement and procedures for the students classified as DDD is not only more restrictive, but causes a heavier financial burden on the district as well.

The second subtheme, reduced funding effects, refers to the lack of funding to address needs for the students classified as DDD, which has created a negative situation. Given the study, the participants all mentioned lack of funding as one of main challenges they face on a daily basis. This lack of funding prevents the staff from purchasing

needed supplies, curriculum components, key instructional assessments, and manipulatives needed to reinforce learning for the students classified as DDD. The reason for these cuts is that districts now have less money for students than they had before because of the cuts implemented in the 82<sup>nd</sup> legislative session, but the academic standards correlated with accountability measures at both the state and federal level continue to rise (Smith, 2011). Lack of funding has also had a negative effect on providing quality professional development and the district's ability to hire more BSS personnel. Teachers working with a challenging population like the students classified as DDD need quality focused professional development to become more culturally proficient instructional leaders within the classroom. However, building professional capacity will take time and a financial commitment from the district to provide specialized development that is meaningful. Malen and Rice (2004) explain that effective change cannot occur if teachers are not given space to allow the new acquisition of knowledge time to develop and work within each individual teacher. Therefore, the district needs a financial plan that includes a commitment to professional development in order to move their instructional program forward by the district, but in the meantime, the reduced funding has caused a negative effect. The Texas chapter of the American Federation of Teachers is reminding taxpayers about the severity of the funding crisis by holding a "Save Texas Schools"; the goal of the rally is to point out that the budget crisis has led to larger class sizes, a lack of instructional materials, and fewer programs to help at-risk students succeed, according to Fink (2012). Funding has also limited the number of BSS personnel that are currently employed by the district.



The organizational model within SB 643 calls for each instructional teacher to have BSS personnel present within the classroom. Currently, this is not in place at the developmental center because of a lack of funding.

The final subtheme within the program culture theme is communication and trust. The lack of effective communication and trust between individuals and campuses seems to be causing a breakdown in quality educational services for the students classified as DDD, producing yet another negative effect. Lindsey and Roberts (2005) assert that leaders, who are administrators and teachers, are aware of the power of person-to-person communication. Communication is simple yet complex, easy to do but also easy to blunder. Walker et.al explains further:

We send from one hundred to three hundred messages a day. These include the messages we intend to send; the message we actually send; the messages as the hearer interprets it; the response of the hearer based on what he or she heard; and our reaction to the exchange of words, meaning and interpretation. (2002, p. 2)

Effective communication is key to an organizations purpose. Communication must be clear and open for an organization to be successful and run efficiently. However, given the findings, effective communication is not happening among the teachers or administrative staff who are directly responsible for the educational programs in place for the students classified as DDD. Communication between the high school and developmental center is marginal at best. When asked by the researcher, several participants said they did not see a purpose in meeting to plan, discuss, and ultimately implement key practices for the students. This lack of communication further adds to

the disconnection among the programs and staff for the students classified as DDD. Everyone just seems to be doing their own things, teaching whatever is available, and not aligning instructional methods or processes.

Instructional leaders must be more cognizant in establishing practices and expectations that promote more one-on-one communication and planning among the two campuses and staff. Lindsey and Roberts explain, “Culturally proficient leaders structure faculty meetings, department and grade level meetings, and meeting with parents and community members in such a way as to maximize person-to-person communication” (2005, p. 128); however, they also note (2005) that schools are often isolating places in which dozens of adults spend eight to ten hours per day in relatively autonomous activities and interactions with their students but rarely spend time in effective conversations with other adults. Given the findings, the teachers appear to spend a lot of time planning or working independently from each other. There were no mentioned department meetings or vertical alignment meetings, which can cause communication barriers and breakdown. To build trust you must establish effective communication. Culturally proficient leaders realize that when they foster effective communication in their ongoing work, they are increasing the likelihood that the requisite skills and attitudes will carry over into the informal conversations amongst colleagues (Lindsey & Robert, 2005). This helps to build relationships and trust. In addition, “culturally proficient leaders see that relationship building through conversation is an important component in developing schools responsive to the needs of diverse and ever-changing communities” (Lindsey & Roberts, 2005, p. 128). Without

effective communication between the two leaders and their staff, there will be no positive strides made to ensure a more equitable and excellent educational environment for the students classified as DDD.

### ***Staffing***

The second overarching theme, staffing, discusses instructional staffing, instructional supports, and instructional leadership challenges currently in place for the students classified as DDD. Three subthemes emerged within this theme: 1) teachers, 2) behavior support specialist, and 3) leadership, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 ***Theme 2: Staffing***

<b>Subtheme</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Summary statement</b>
Teachers	Positive/Negative	Caring/Deficit Views
Behavior Support Specialist	Negative	Lack of numbers
Leadership	Positive/Negative	Competency & Focus

The first subtheme, teachers, refers to the instructional staff at the high school and the developmental center. The teachers at both campuses seem to truly care for the students and want to work with this challenging group of individuals. The teachers seem to have a strong commitment to their students and want them to be successful. When discussing the students, the researcher sensed that they have positive relationships with the kids. They refer to their assignment as a calling and point out that it takes a certain type of individual to work with this challenging population. However, during these

same conversations, the researcher perceived that a lot of staff members have adopted the attitude that the students classified as DDD cannot accomplish much educationally. The staff would mention behaviors that are often times exhibited by the students or that the student's cognitive levels are extremely low and cannot achieve much academically. It appears some of the staff may have fallen into the first equity trap mentioned by McKenzie and Scheurich in 2004. McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) assert that this teacher deficit view believes that students of color enter school with many deficits including lack of motivation, behavior issues, as well as cultural and generational inadequacies. Teachers, especially at the developmental center, would mention their student's disability, their background, what they have been through, and challenges they may face in the future. It is the researchers perception that the "missionary view" some of the teachers have for the students has clouded what their true purpose is for these students and this program, which is to ensure both an equitable and challenging educational experience. This is referred to as deficit thinking. Valencia (2010) explains: "Deficit thinking is a pseudoscience founded on racial and class bias." Brown (2012) further asserts,

"Hoping to explain the lower academic achievement of these students, teachers often cast blame on students' backgrounds and the challenges they face outside of school. Teachers describe parents who are uncaring, unable to attend school events and unwilling to put forth the effort necessary to get what is best for their children" (p. 1).

Teachers who are the instructional leaders for these students can address this notion of

deficit thinking by realizing that: 1) students have inherent strengths and values because of the challenges they may have faced in life, and 2) having the ability and knowledge to form relationships with these students that draw upon these inherent strengths and values to serve the students in the best manner by using their personal experiences. Ultimately, Brown (2012) notes, “Avoiding deficit thinking requires a willingness to take the time to learn more about the lives of individuals students outside of school and celebrating their uniqueness” (p.1). It was unquestionable to the researcher that the teachers care for their students and want what is best, but they must not let this feeling or their perceptions of what happened to these students in the past derail their true purpose. They must hold firm to high expectations of learning and achievement for the students classified as DDD. Doing so will require an awareness on behalf of the instructional staff and a willingness to change by acquiring the knowledge needed to serve appropriately.

Nevertheless, findings from the study support that some of the teachers need further training in how to adequately and effectively provide instruction for this group of students on a daily basis. Lindsey and Roberts (2005) further explain that instructional leadership within the classroom is the single most influential variable driving student achievement. To educate special populations, we must seek to find culturally proficient instructional leaders for the classroom. Culturally proficient leaders advocate for their students because it is the right and moral thing to do no matter who is in the room (Lindsey & Roberts, 2005). These findings have produced both a positive and negative effect for the educational program in place for the students classified as DDD. Positively, the instructional staff seems to truly care and want to do what is right.

Negatively, the researcher does not get the impression there are any expectations for growth in the area of culturally proficiency, nor does Main ISD have a plan to ensure further instructional development occurs. Elmore (1997) adds:

Successful teacher training focuses on concrete classroom applications of general ideas; it exposes teachers to actual practice rather than to descriptions of practice; it involves opportunities for observation, critique, and reflection; it involves opportunities for group support and collaboration; and it involves deliberate evaluation and feedback by skilled practitioners with expertise about good teaching. (p. 9)

For the teachers to have a positive instructional impact on the students classified as DDD, the district must establish a professional development plan. Hoyle, Bjork, Collier, and Glass (2005) affirm, “Overcoming resistance to change and building the capacity of teachers, administrators, and staff to develop professional communities or communities of learners to collectively solve problems of practice and change the system is a primary concern for district administrators.” Teacher trainings must be at the heart of the educational programs currently in place for the students classified as DDD. However, teachers must have the opportunity to attend these trainings and use strategies learned within the instructional environment, but often cannot accomplish this because they have to address behavior issues that ordinarily would be addressed by a BSS if present within the instructional environment.

The second subtheme, behavior support specialists, refers to maintaining a sufficient number of BSS personnel present daily within the instructional environment at

both the high school and developmental center. Sufficiency refers to the adequate number of individuals required to accomplish the provision of a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), according to AISD (2009). A sufficient number of these individuals is currently present at the high school, but not at the developmental center. This has produced a negative effect because the teachers find themselves spending more time correcting and redirecting the students than providing them with a quality enriched instruction. There is no literature available to support the need for further BSS personnel within the instructional environment to support learning. However, the current model designed by SB 643 calls for a BSS to be present within each instructional classroom. Unfortunately, the current model is not being followed in Main ISD.

The third subtheme within staffing is leadership. Educational leadership and supervision lay the foundation for an organization to function equitably and justly for all students. In order to accomplish this, educational leaders must develop a collective vision, must shape culture and climate, use information, frame problems, exercise leadership processes to achieve common goals, and act ethically for all educational communities (Hoyle, et al., 2005). Leaders who constantly evaluate people, programs, and services within a school building can begin to shape the culture and climate of a in a positive way. The goal is to improve the organization through effective evaluations of programs and services within the building. Roberson (2007) explains that the basis for meaningful evaluations begins and ends with two key ideas: First, each and every member of the organization is critical for its success, and second, given the importance

of individuals in the organization, it is vital that organizational members grow professionally so they mature as contributing members of the organization.

Currently, leadership over the educational programs, based on findings from the research, does not have the capability to move the educational programs forward for the students classified as DDD. The leader over these programs must be visionary. Hoyle, et al. (2005) states, “Visionary leadership is knowing how to inspire hearts, ignite minds, and move hands to create tomorrow” (p. 21). Until recently there was no improvement plan, there are no meaningful evaluations being conducted on a consistent and regular basis, there is no professional development plan in place to adequately train the staff to become more culturally proficient, and finally, but most importantly, there appears to be no vision or purpose coming from the leadership to improve the programs for the students classified as DDD. Furthermore, the inability of the current leadership in place at the developmental center to adequately organize, mobilize, train, and focus his staff currently in place has caused a negative impact on the educational programs in place for the students classified as DDD. Leaders over challenging programs such as the one currently in place for the students classified as DDD must have the knowledge and passion to be “transformational” (Lindsey & Roberts, 2005).

### ***Curriculum and Instruction***

The final overarching theme is curriculum and instruction. Curriculum is a complex idea containing multiple components including goals, content, pedagogy, and instructional practices, according to Hyson et al. (2007). Hyson et al. (2007) state further, “Curriculum should serve as a comprehensive guide for instruction and day-to-



day interactions with all young children.” Enriched curriculums should recommend practices for: 1) promoting active engagement and learning, 2) individualizing and changing instructional practices for each individual based on good data, 3) providing rich opportunities for students to learn in consistent environments, and 4) collaboratively working together with professionals and families (Hyson et al., 2007). Four subthemes emerged within this theme including: 1) curriculum, 2) educational alignment, 3) professional development, and 4) student achievement, as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3 *Theme 3: Curriculum & Instruction*

<b>Subtheme</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Summary statement</b>
Curriculum	Negative	Hodge Podge
Educational Alignment	Negative	Disconnect
Professional Development	Positive/Negative	Purpose
Student Achievement	Negative	Consistent model

The first subtheme, curriculum, refers to the inability of some staff to either find a curriculum, for example vocational education, or use the general curriculum in the core classes to address the individual needs of the students classified as DDD. The 2004 amendments to IDEA require that all children, regardless of ability, have access to general curriculum, and have the opportunity to participate and make progress in the general curriculum. The common response from the participants was that their current curriculum has to be altered so much for the students to be successful. Teachers find themselves simplifying even the basic tasks within the general curriculum because of the

cognitive levels of some of their students. Due to this, many of them wish there was a curriculum already developed that would more closely align with the students individual needs. This has produced a negative effect because the teachers find themselves using a hodge podge of resources trying to find anything that will work for their students.

Hyson et al. (2007) affirm the teachers' positions when they state that "to benefit all children, including those with disabilities and developmental delays, it is important to implement an integrated, developmentally appropriate, universally designed curriculum framework that is flexible, comprehensive, and links to assessment and program evaluation activities" (p. 3). The problem is when most districts purchase or buy curriculum, they do so with the "normal" child in mind. Many times the thought of "universal curriculum" is never considered. Hyson et al. (2007) assert, "When a curriculum framework is being designed, the full range of diversity represented in the children and families who may participate should be considered" (p. 4). Universally designed daily activities, instructional supports, and materials help ensure that all children have meaningful and successful access to and participation in curriculum, as stated by Karger and Hitchcock (2003) in Hyson et al. (2007).

However, selecting a curriculum is not a campus task, but rather, most often, a district task. Curriculums should consider each child's individual needs and interests from the beginning, which helps decrease the likelihood that an adaptation will draw unwanted attention to a child (Hyson et al., 2007). Hyson et al. (2007) assert that universally designed curriculums share three essential principles: 1) multiple means of

representation, 2) multiple means of engagement, and 3) multiple means of expression.

They explain further:

These principles of universal design for learning are essential for ensuring both physical access and meaningful participation across daily routines and activities for all young children. Children with diverse cultural or linguistic backgrounds, children who have identified disabilities, or children who need additional support to master content. (Hyson et al., 2007, p. 4)

Nevertheless, curriculum, curriculum planning, and instructional methods should be aligned with the districts' overall educational purpose in mind, which should be to ensure an equitable and excellent education for all students.

The second subtheme, educational alignment, refers to the lack of instructional alignment between the two campuses. There is no communication, planning, or organization between the high school and the developmental center campus. The WEAC (2012) states:

It is critical that any district or building considering more inclusive practices take the time necessary to plan effectively. Attention to special education students and staff alone is only half a strategy. Planning should involve all stakeholders in researching, discussing and examining the entire educational program. Real inclusion involves restructuring of a school's entire program and requires constant assessment of practices and results. (p. 5)

Given the study and findings, the lack of educational alignments has caused and continues to cause a negative impact for both the staff and students. Instructional

planning is not happening among colleagues. There are no common planning periods aligned so teachers have the opportunity to meet and visit about curriculum components, processes, or methods of best practice. There are no aligned professional development sessions with the high school to discuss policies, procedures, or practices to strengthen the educational programs in place for the students classified as DDD. There simply is no alignment between the two campuses. In fact, most who participated do not see a need in being more aligned. Creating educational alignment takes focus, time, and effort. Scheurich and Skrla (2003) state, curriculum alignment is a large, time and effort-intensive undertaking. Scheurich and Skrla (2003) further add:

In order for everyone at all levels within a school or school district to have a clear understanding of what the curriculum standards are for each subject area at each grade level, and in order for teachers to teach all of the content specified by the standards for each subject and grade, curriculum alignment is an absolute necessity. (p. 34)

Campuses that do not focus on curriculum alignment cannot ensure they are covering all stated standards for their students. Nor can these same campuses ensure they are covering all the content from year to year without leaving gaps in students' learning. Educational planning and alignment is a district's or its campuses' road map. This is a main part of the purpose and direction a district and its campuses must possess to ensure students become successful. Given the findings from the study, there does not seem to be a purpose for educational alignment within Main ISD, which can lead to many problems. For example, Scheurich and Skrla (2003) state:

Without educational alignment, the third-grade teacher has no clear idea of what subject are knowledge and skills the second-grade students were supposed to have been taught. Nor would this teacher have a clear idea of what she or he was supposed to teach so that the right foundation was created for the fourth-grade teacher. (p. 39)

When these kinds of problems occur, educational gaps in student learning start to arise creating a whole host of problems for future teachers in a child's development and educational career. Scheurich and Skrla (2003) explain further that without set standards at each level of education and without the alignment of those standards to help ensure all students no matter their race, ethnicity, culture, income, or home language are gaining the knowledge yearly that they need, schools cannot become equitable and excellent.

The third subtheme, professional development, refers to the instructional trainings used to adequately train the staff to effectively instruct and handle situations that may occur with the students classified as DDD. There is a growing consensus among educational reformers that quality professional development for teachers and administrators lays at the center of educational reform and instructional improvement, according to Elmore (1997). However, a district or campus vision of instructional improvement "depends heavily on people being willing to take the initiative, risks, and responsibility for themselves, for students, and for each other" (Elmore, 1997, p. 19). This subtheme is producing both a positive and negative effect given the study. Positively, trainings seem to be occurring that help staff learn how to better handle such a challenging population, behaviorally. The students classified as DDD come from an

array of backgrounds and present a multitude of challenges behaviorally for the staff, so professional development sessions directed at behavioral issues, like Capturing Kids' Hearts, have been conducted. However, negatively, there does not seem to be enough professional development scheduled that addresses instructional improvement. Minow (2001) states, teacher training is one of the most promising opportunities for improvement in providing students with disabilities genuine access to the curriculum. Given the findings of this research study, the lack of teacher trainings devoted to instruction may be why more behavior issues are occurring. Students that are not engaged tend to lose interest and eventually become disruptive from being bored or lack of interest. This is why it is so important for a district to invest in instructional improvement activities. Elmore (1997) asserts, "Everyone in the system should be engaged in instructional improvement as part of their routine work" (p. 17). Instructional improvement is not the responsibility of a select few who operate in isolation from others, but rather, a collegial responsibility of everyone in the system, working together in a variety of ways, (Elmore, 1997).

The final subtheme within curriculum and instruction is student achievement. Given the study, how student growth is measured either daily or yearly did not seem to be very clear to most of the participants. When asked about measuring student achievement the participants would refer back to their disabilities and how low they are cognitively. Most, during either an interview or observation, seemed to be happy if they just were able to get the students to perform basic tasks and make it through the day. Participants could not really explain how they gauge student's achievement or when they

did discuss student achievement, it was very vague, which produces a negative effect. Sure, several mentioned the students take state assessments, but none could really point to or show the researcher an example of student achievement or produce any data to support that growth is being made, which leads the researcher to believe there is no set purpose for the measurement of student achievement for the students classified as DDD. A district or campus assessment program's purpose should be tailored to address and analyze all student growth. When students with disabilities are left out of the assessment process and the subsequent results data, they are also left out of any reform effort, according to Ysseldyke, Thurlow, McGrew, and Shriner (1994). Scheurich and Skrla (2003) quote Rod Paige (2002) to say, "Never in the history of human civilizations has a society attempted to educate all of its children. Under this new law, we will strive to provide every boy and girl in America with a high quality education-regardless of is or her income, ability, or background" (p. 63). Formative assessments should be part of the matrix to gauge student achievement for the students classified as DDD. In the past, students with disabilities have not been required to take these formative assessments. As a result, these students were allowed to fall behind further producing inequitable situations and environments for many of our students in America. However, with the passage of NCLB, "markers" have been installed that can help bring about a more equitable and excellent educational experience for all, as stated by Scheurich and Skrla (2003). These markers help bring about an awareness that helps both teachers and administrator make better, more informed decisions regarding student achievement. However, given cognitive and emotional disabilities and challenges of the students

classified as DDD, formative assessments should not be the only measure of student achievement. Scheurich and Skrla (2003) assert:

To turn your district, school, or classroom into a test factory is unquestionably unethical, unprofessional, and immoral. It is a violation at the deepest level of the very idea of public education in a democracy and the very idea of teaching as a profession. (p. 66)

The students classified as DDD need to be tested academically, periodically, with the intent to show curricular growth. Unfortunately, given the study there does not seem to be a set curriculum, as stated earlier, so measuring student achievement and growth over a period of time, if variables do not remain as consistent as possible, would yield invalid data upon which to make decisions. This presents a huge obstacle that is tied directly to and affects student achievement.

However, this discussion goes back to the purpose for the educational programs in place for the students classified as DDD. Is the purpose to just try to get them to graduation no matter how much standards have to be lowered? Is the purpose to try to get some of them to a level at which they can cope better in society? Is the purpose to give them the skills they will need to be productive members of society? Above, curriculum, educational alignment, professional development, and student achievement have been discussed as part of an overarching theme of this study, curriculum and instruction. There is no variable more important to improving a student's performance in education than curriculum and instruction. Each subtheme is a piston that drives the engine of curriculum and instruction. Each piston has a purpose and that is to produce



combustion and fire producing power for the engine to run effectively. If the pistons of curriculum and instruction do not have a purpose and are not all firing in time there cannot be and will never be efficiency, nor will the engine be able to drive student achievement.

**General Implications of Results**

Table 4 *Overarching Themes*

Theme 1: Program Culture
Theme 2: Staffing
Theme 3: Curriculum and Instruction

Table 5 *Potential Causes*

1. Debilitating Perceptions
2. No Mission “Purpose”
3. No Culture for Success

***Debilitating Perceptions***

This study has produced several broad implications that could be addressed by the district to more equitably serve the students classified as DDD, summarized in Table 4. These students, like their non-disabled peers, are protected under federal law. The researcher has also delineated three general implications, see Table 5. First, there seems to be a debilitating perception about the students classified as DDD permeating the district. The students classified as DDD are classified as intellectually disabled and have

been “charged” with a crime, not convicted. Their current placement at the MSSLC has been established either by court order or because the parents can no longer care for their individual needs and have sought remedy from the State of Texas. Due to these “charges,” there seems to be a perception by district personnel that the students classified as DDD pose a serious threat to others within the district, most especially other students.

During the interviews, the researcher discussed with the participants the current placement of some of the students classified as DDD. During these discussions, the researcher was led to believe the placement for some of the students is based on perceptions. Meaning, the researcher is led to believe from information gathered during interviews and observations that more of the students classified as DDD are not being integrated into their true LRE because of perceptions, concerning student safety, coming from somewhere within the district. In 2008, Main ISD hired a superintendent that felt the students classified as DDD posed serious threats to the “normal” student body. During his time in Main, the student classified as DDD were segregated back to both the alternative campus and the MSSLC campus by administrative decision. Apparently, the decision was made to ensure student safety. According to IDEA and the ESEA:

All children will be served; their parents will be directly involved, their unique needs will be assessed and provided for; they will not be segregated or hidden from the mainstream; each one will receive an education that is appropriate; and there will be procedural and legal requirements in place to make sure that all these things are really happening. (Walsh et al., 2005, p. 98)

Unfortunately, even though processes aligned with IDEA and federal law, such as ARD meetings, BIPs, IEPs, and transition plans are happening, the researcher still has the perception that the true goal and rules for reintegration of special education students into the general educational setting are not being pushed or followed in some cases. For example, Dunn (1968) asserts, “the conscience of special educators needs to rub up against morality” (p. 20). For example, the researcher, on March 23, 2012, observed the classroom for the students classified as DDD at the high school campus. During the observations, he discussed several items with both the teacher and the behavioral specialists. During the conversation, it was mentioned that one of the students who had been fully integrated back into the general education setting was going to be sent back to the developmental center for persistent misbehaviors. On Friday, March 24, 2012, while observing at the developmental center, the researcher saw the young man discussed by the high school staff. He was sitting in his Science class waiting for instruction at 8am. This change in placement may not follow IDEA or special education law. According to Walsh et al. (2005):

Under the new law (effective July 2005), the ARD committee must review all relevant information and then answer two questions: 1) was the conduct of the student caused by, or did it have a direct and substantial relationship to the child’s disability, and 2) was the conduct of the student a direct result of the school’s failure to implement the IEP (p. 121).

If the ARD committee answers “yes” to either question, there cannot be a change in placement unless the parents or student representative agrees. During the discussions

with the staff at both campuses, they never mentioned having an ARD or discussing the students IEP before the change of placement occurred. The researcher questions— Instead of the young man being sent back to the most restrictive environment within the district, why didn't the district look at his services at the high school and adjust his schedule, so he has a partial inclusive schedule while he worked out some of his behavior issues? It appears the system, his IEP, and his BIP were not looked at or allowed to work. Walsh et al. (2005) add:

Even if a child is properly placed in a separate special education program, the school district has the duty to provide as much mainstreaming opportunity as possible. The school should look for opportunities for mainstreaming in art, music, and physical education. The student should have the opportunity to ride the regular school bus, eat with other students in the cafeteria, attend assemblies, and play on the playground with the other students. (p. 107)

### ***No Mission “Purpose”***

Second, it became obvious that the educational programs in place for the students classified as DDD have no real direction. Forbes (2012) stated: “Education's purpose is to replace an empty mind with an open one” (p.1). How can “education's purpose” occur when there is no stated purpose communicated, planned, discussed, or reviewed by key faculty members within the district or at either the developmental center or the high school. There really seems to be a hands off approach permeating throughout the district when discussing the programs and services set up for the student classified as DDD. One almost gets the feeling that there is a perception of: “We have to serve these

students because they are within our attendance zone” instead of “We get the opportunity to serve these students who live within our zone.” There are great people working at both facilities who truly care for the students and their educational opportunities and successes. It is apparent that the staff wants what is best for their students, but have many obstacles standing in their way, which has been laid out within this study as themes and subthemes. All of the themes and subthemes point to one overarching problem within the district. The fact that there is not a “true purpose” for the educational program in place for the students classified as DDD: A purpose to provide a FAPE for the students classified as DDD and see them become successful with their grade appropriate peers. As Dunn (1968) stated, “embarking on an American Revolution in Special Education will require strength of purpose” (p. 20). Within the field of education there must be purpose tied to everything we do for students.

Roosevelt (1930) said it best:

What is the purpose of education? This question agitates scholars, teachers, statesmen, every group, in fact, of thoughtful men and women. The conventional answer is the acquisition of knowledge, the reading of books, and the learning of facts. Perhaps because there are so many books and the branches of knowledge in which we can learn facts are so multitudinous today, we begin to hear more frequently that the function of education is to give children a desire to learn and to teach them how to use their minds and where to go to acquire facts when their curiosity is aroused. Even more all-embracing than this is the statement made not

long ago, before a group of English headmasters, by the Archbishop of York, that "the true purpose of education is to produce citizens." (p. 4)

### *No Culture for Success*

Third, the culture of the educational programs in place for the students classified as DDD, from the perceptions of those participating in the study, appears to be in disarray. There does not seem to be a common purpose or common direction for the educational programs in place for the students classified as DDD. If there is no purpose then there can be no established culture that is pushing towards success. Lindsey and Roberts (2005) quote Elmore (2000) to say:

Improvement is more of a function of learning to do the right thing in the setting where you work than it is of what you know when you start to do the work....Organizations that improve do so because they create and nurture agreement on what is worth achieving, and they set in motion the internal processes by which people progressively learn how to do what they need to do in order to achieve what is worthwhile. (p. 141)

While the researcher was immersed within the research site conducting observations and interviews, there seemed to be no structure, or connectivity at the developmental center or between the developmental center and the high school. Given the study, the lack of a culture for success seems to originate with leadership. Scheurich and Skrla (2003) explain:

We all know that good leadership, the 'bodies and spirits' of our leadership, is crucial to 'the justice of our cause' for equity and excellence in schooling. In

fact, many would say that strong, outstanding leadership is necessary to any significant transformation of any organization, schools included. (p. 99)

From the results of the study, the current leadership in place governing the policies and practices for the students classified as DDD does not appear to have either the passion or knowledge needed to bring about a transformational change. The type of leader needed for this position must have a foundation based on “equity and excellence” and a mission for “transformation.” Scheurich and Skrla (2003) further state:

The most important characteristic of a leader-whether a principal, teacher leader, counselor, or custodian-who is creating or who is going to create an equitable and excellent school is that this person has developed a strong ethical or moral core focused on equity and excellence as the only right choice for schools in democracy (p. 100).

Lindsey and Roberts (2005) further expound that to make the shift in thinking and progress down the cultural continuum, an individual must understand the dynamic of entitlement and privilege and how those relate to systems of oppression. The leader must be able to transform his understanding and beliefs and then transfer this new knowledge to his staff. Lindsey and Roberts (2005) assert:

To make the shift from culturally pre-competent to culturally competent is to recognize the dynamics of entitlement and privilege, to recognize that our schools contribute to disparities in achievement, and to believe that educators can make choices that positively affect student achievement” (p. 111).

Given the study and findings, until current leadership beliefs and practices change to foster a more equitable and transformational approach to educational opportunities for the students classified as DDD, there will be no culture for success.

### **Implications for Policy, Practice, and Future Research**

#### ***Policy***

Proficiency questions need to be asked to see if policy mandates equity in practice. Policies such as “zero tolerance” must be avoided because they do not take into consideration the development of adolescents, as stated by Cahn (2006). Objective based policies must be implemented to protect the staff, students, and the integrity of the program itself. Given the study, the researcher does not believe that further policy development is needed at either the state or federal level, but that at the district level, the state and federal policies need to be followed and carried out as designed. Policy development at the district level should be formulated so that it addresses accountability measures based on seeing more students move through the different LRE levels into mainstream opportunities. Currently, there seems to be no policy or standard that focuses attention on seeing more students moved into mainstream opportunities to excel with their grade appropriate peers. This lack of policy, which would help set expectations, is enabling the program and causes more students to stay in more restrictive environments for longer periods of time. Although the district, to some degree, is following IDEA, policy development to ensure more students are in their true LRE is needed.



Further, local policy should be developed at the district level that requires every individual associated with the current educational programs in place for the students classified as DDD to receive ongoing professional development training each year. This policy should clearly outline the number of professional development days, the types of trainings, the expected outcomes and reflections from the trainings, and then ultimately timelines for evaluations to be conducted to see if pedagogical changes are being made to more effectively provide services for the students classified as DDD. The only way to effectively bring about change to ensure that educational programs are culturally proficient and transformative (Lindsey & Roberts, 2005) is to develop policy that will both evaluate and hold accountable those who are responsible for educating these students.

### ***Practice***

#### *Culturally Responsive Leadership*

Cultural responsiveness can be defined as the process of “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students and teachers to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them. It teaches to and through the strength of these students. It is culturally validating and affirming” (Gay, 2000, p. 29). Currently, there are a total of sixty-eight students classified as DDD at either the development center or the high school. There are sixty-one students currently receiving services at the development center. Twenty-two are White, thirty-one are African American, and eight are Hispanic. They are all classified as special education students and they are all classified as economically

disadvantaged. At the high school, there are seven students currently being served. Five are White, one is African American, and one is Hispanic. They also are all classified as both special education and economically disadvantaged students. Culturally responsive leadership is essential when serving a population that is as extremely diverse in ethnicity and cognitive development as the students classified as DDD. Responsive leadership is critical in making a school both productive and efficient for its students. Selecting culturally responsive leaders who are competent or have the ability and passion to move from cultural pre-competence to cultural proficiency should be the mission of Main ISD.

Cultural competence is having the ability to guide the values and behaviors of individuals so that they may be able to interact effectively in a culturally diverse environment (Guerra & Nelson, 2007). Lindsey and Robert (2005) further discuss the need to implement the essential elements of culturally competent school leadership when transforming oneself or an educational institution into a person or organization that focuses on equity and not tolerance. The five essential principles are assess culture, value diversity, manage the dynamics of differences, adapt to diversity, and institutionalize cultural knowledge. Lindsey and Roberts (2005) state: “Culturally competent school leaders take the responsibility and opportunity to use the five essential elements as leverage points for improving current practices in order that educators, students, parents, and community members are in an environment in which continuous improvement is fundamental to the school vision” (p. 71). A culturally responsive proficient leader is needed to transform the educational programs currently in place for the students classified as DDD so that more students have an equitable opportunity for

mainstream environments that are both rewarding and challenging.

Transformational leadership, according to Lindsay and Roberts (2005), requires a shift in thinking, possessing the ability to recognize privileges and oppressions and “to recognize that our schools contribute to have disparities in achievement” (p. 111). This person must possess the awareness to recognize these disparities so proactive measures can be taken to recognize privileges and eliminate oppressions. Banks (1991) asserts that if education is to empower marginalized groups, it must be transformative. Being transformative involves helping “students to develop the knowledge, skills, and values needed to become social critics who can make reflective decisions and implement their decisions in effective personal, social, political, and economic action” (p. 131).

#### *Culturally Responsive Instructional Leadership*

Instructional leaders in the classroom are the most influential individuals in schools today. Without the acquisition of knowledge needed to interact and educate all students within the public school system, we will continue to fail. To educate a special population such as the DDD students, Main ISD must find culturally proficient instructional leaders for the classroom. Gay (2000) defines culturally responsive teaching as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them. Ladson-Billings (1992) explains that culturally responsive teachers develop intellectual, social, emotional, and political learning by “using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 382). This is bold instructional leadership, which must be in place for these students. Teachers who are hired must be willing to progress through the stages of

the cultural continuum to break down internal barriers with the goal in mind to better serve these students. Lindsay and Roberts (2005), quote Daniel Goleman (1995):

Being able to put aside one's self-centered focus and impulses has social benefits: It opens the way to empathy, to real listening, to taking another person's perspective. Empathy...leads to caring, altruism, and compassion. Seeing things from another's perspective breaks down biased stereotypes, and so breeds tolerance and acceptance of differences. (p. 51)

Developing this type of empathy is key to educational attainment for the DDD students who come from an array of social and cultural backgrounds. If the politicians only focus on testing and accountability measures and we as a nation fail to raise the level of cultural competence in our teaching, the entire educational reform movement will fail according to Howard (2006). Educational leaders in Main ISD who are directly involved with the decision making for the DDD program must place culturally proficient instructional staffing as one of the most important pillars for the program to build upon.

### *Capacity Building*

Instructional capacity building is generated through quality professional development with a focus on instruction, goal setting, accelerated instructional practices, and additional resources needed to move students forward (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987). Professional development goal setting and establishing a true purpose for the programs in place for the students classified as DDD must become a focal point of discussion for those within Main ISD. According to McDonnell and Elmore (1987), "Capacity-building is the transfer of money for the purpose of investment in materials, intellectual,

or human resources” (p. 134). In order for Main ISD to transform its leadership and instructional staff into a group of culturally proficient educators, district level administrators must work with the developmental center director to develop a plan that clearly outlines this purpose with the funding allotments and time required to see this transformation take place.

Capacity is the school’s fiscal, human, social, and cultural capital, as well as its information resources (Malen & Rice, 2004). Once the right goals are in place to see current leaders transformed into culturally responsive instructional leaders, plans and professional development opportunities can begin to be scheduled to help bring along the instructional staff’s ability to relate to the students classified as DDD and use their inherent strengths and values from past experiences to bring instruction to life each day. However, this kind of cultural change on behalf of both leadership and the instructors in front of the students each day will take time and a financial commitment by the district. Effective capacity building takes time, effective planning, and a willingness to change on the part of educators across America and the State of Texas (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987). The goal of culturally responsive leadership and instruction must be a district initiative with aligned goals, professional development opportunities, and planning meetings that are educationally aligned to allow quality instruction to reach all students and not just a select few.

### *Educational Alignment*

Educational programs should be connected according to both federal and state law, especially when discussing special education students. Educational programs for

these students should not be splintered or at alternative campuses. The programs for the students classified as DDD who are intellectually disabled should be no more than extensions to the educational programs in place at the high school. The WEAC (2012) states:

It is critical that any district or building considering more inclusive practices take the time necessary to plan effectively. Attention to special education students and staff alone is only half a strategy. Planning should involve all stakeholders in researching, discussing and examining the entire educational program. Real inclusion involves restructuring of a school's entire program and requires constant assessment of practices and results. (p. 5)

All curriculum planning, instructional planning, and instructional supports and resources should, in conjunction with non-special education students, be correlated with the students classified as DDD. Planning is one of the most important components for students to be successful within the instructional model. The teachers at the high school, in cooperation with the teachers at the developmental center, need to work collectively when planning instruction for the students classified as DDD. Basic human tendencies allow teachers who only work with special education students and who, most especially, are segregated to an alternative campus or developmental center to relax when it comes to planning. Meanings, teachers do as they have always done and function on a reactionary level, which does not provide the framework needed for special education. Special education students should be challenged within their own limits as much or more than non special education students. The complexities of planning for these particular

individuals should be far more advanced and challenging in nature. Instructional plans for the students classified as DDD should reflect very similarly with those who are in regular classes at the high school except with appropriate accommodations and or modifications as needed and warranted. Reflective questions that challenge the staff's understanding and ability to serve the students classified as DDD should be involved in the planning process.

Most importantly, the staff's ability at both the high school and the developmental center to deliver quality, rigorous instruction on a daily basis is essential to the success of the programs in place for the students classified as DDD. To do this most effectively, processes should be planned and discussed so there is a consistent approach to any given subject, for example: teaching Pythagorean Theorem. These processes should be consistent and aligned district wide. As the students progress through the RTI model into less restrictive environments, if the processes are the same the students will make the necessary adjustments quicker in order to achieve. In relation to bowling and bumper guards, the instructional staff at both campuses must possess the knowledge and confidence to let the students almost fail before they push them back into the center of the lane. This brings about extension, discovery, reasoning, patience, and focus that otherwise, if not allowed, would be lost within the instructional environment.

### ***Future Research***

Given the study, further research should be conducted looking at the current educational programs in place from the student's perception. Although, this would be much more difficult due to current Instructional Review Board (IRB) standards to

protect vulnerable research subjects, it is necessary to ensure successful programs are in place for students classified as DDD. The current study analyzed the programs in place from the staff's perceptions. This only gives the researcher and readers one viewpoint or angle. Collecting data and perceptions from the students, themselves, can provide a different angle that could potentially generate very important findings. Plus, this gives back ownership to the students and enables them to help drive and develop current programs in place. To tie in with Moral Leadership (Lindsey & Roberts, 2005), this is also the right thing to do for these individuals. Morally, research should be conducted and analyzed looking at the world and educational programs through the lenses of the students. This, most definitely, would help focus the image for all.

Further, more in depth research could be conducted to determine the level of compliance the district has with following IDEA mandates. This research could look closely at how individual education plans are developed and by whom. What data goes into these plans and does the school district and the student's legal guardian or parent jointly develop the plans? ARD meetings could be analyzed to determine if the IEPs are truly addressing the individual goals for each student. Are ARD decisions based on current student data and teacher observations? Is the student in his or her LRE? Is the student being successful in his or her LRE, and if not, what RTI methods are being implemented and used to correct the situation? These are all questions that further research could help to determine if the district is in compliance with IDEA.

During the 81<sup>st</sup> Texas legislative session in 2009, additional funding was written into SB 643, which provides an additional \$5000 for each student plus their additional



weighted funding in Tier 1(basic allotment & SPED) for the district to use in educating these students. The lack of funding was a major concern for most of the participants within the study. Further research is needed to look closely at the additional funds generated by the students classified as DDD. These funds should be tracked to determine if the needs of either the program or the students classified as DDD are being addressed using these additional funds. The effects of reduced funding seemed to be one of, if not the most deficit subtheme that was generated from this study. Close attention to how the dollars are being spent would be an excellent research project.

### **Summary**

The focus of this study was to examine the perceptions of the professional staff (teachers, counselors, school leaders, and other professional staff) as to the nature and quality of the educational experiences provided by the high school and the alternative school. Ultimately, it was the intent of this study to help ensure the educational programs in place are both equitable and challenging. Individual perceptions can dictate many human natures including but not limited to our attitudes, outlook, and our drive to enforce change or our willingness to settle or accept the status quo. These same perceptions can cause us to stereotype individuals, label individuals, or alienate individuals through the usage of subjective decision-making and deficit thinking. These perceptions are fueled by our inability to further understand larger cultural issues, such as privilege and oppression, issues that permeate throughout society and transfer into our schools. Often times these oppressive perceptions tied with subjective decision-making have created stagnant situations for many schools and individuals leading to inequitable

environments not focused on educating all students. At this point, students begin to fail, fall out of school, and ultimately end up in the prison systems all because there was a lack of true knowledge about each other and our many different cultures and backgrounds.

The only way to change this vicious cycle is through the acquisition of knowledge and skills. School districts and especially their leaders need to become more cognizant about what it truly means to be culturally proficient, to more closely focus on and understand the students that walk through the school's doors every morning. This must start with the leadership ranks and then permeate throughout the levels of the organization. Policies, practices, and procedures must reflect this internal understanding and culture for proficiency in educating each and every student.

I have heard before that someone had a swagger when he or she walked, a kind of confidence about himself or herself. This style of walk is needed in Main ISD for the students classified as DDD. The educational leaders and staff over the educational programs in place for the students classified as DDD need to have a certain culture or swagger that exhibits cultural proficiency and transformation. This kind of confidence and swagger will permeate through the organization bringing about the initial climate changes that are needed for true change to begin, thus ensuring a more equitable system of education for these students. Over time, if the policies, procedures, practices continue to evolve and the people leading the programs in place for the students classified as DDD continue to gain knowledge needed to be culturally proficient leaders, a culture for success will start to unfold. It is only then that true learning will occur for the students

classified as DDD and true progress will be made in the educational program in place for them within Main ISD.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEW GUIDE**

- 1) If I were to ask you about the educational programs here for the students classified as DD, what would you say those programs are? In other words, what does the school staff do differently for the students classified as DDD that they don't do for the other students?
- 2) How have these educational programs supported the students classified as DDD?
- 3) If there are different things you do for the students classified as DDD, how do you see those efforts working or not working?
- 4) What is your perception of the SPED policies in place within the MISD that help govern the students classified as DDD?
- 5) What about the students classified as DDD and their SPED issues, how do those affect what you do?
- 6) What specific instructional goals are in place for the students classified as DDD?
- 7) What would you add to strengthen the programs in place for the students classified as DDD?
- 8) What are the weaknesses in your efforts to serve the students classified as DDD?
- 9) What are the main challenges you face with the students classified as DDD?
- 10) What, if anything, worries you about the students classified as DDD?
- 11) If you could change one thing, in relation to the program, what would that be and how would it impact the students?

12) How has the presence of these students in the building impacted the overall educational environment?



**APPENDIX B**

**COUNSELOR INTERVIEW GUIDE**

- 1) How have you handled scheduling issues associated with the students classified as DDD?
- 2) How do you feel about the opportunity to work with this population of students?
- 3) How has working with the students classified as DDD impacted your counseling work?
- 4) How has it changed how you do counseling with these students and others?
- 5) How has the presence of these students in the building impacted the overall educational environment?
- 6) If you think you are missing some needed training for working with the students classified as DDD, what is that training?
- 7) What kind of trainings does the MISD offer for you to better serve these students and their unique needs on a daily bases?
- 8) How has this training been helpful, or not?

**APPENDIX C**

**TEACHER INTERVIEW GUIDE**

- 1) How do you feel about working with the students classified as DDD?
- 2) What do you feel your main challenges are in working with this group of students?
- 3) How are they different for you than your students that are not classified as DDD?
- 4) How do you treat them differently in your classes, if you do?
- 5) What do you do differently in your classes because the students classified as DDD are there?
- 6) What types of professional development opportunities does the MISD provide for teachers and how do these trainings directly impact the students?
- 7) How have these trainings helped your development and understanding of the DDD students?
- 8) Why do you like or not like working with these students?
- 9) What is your goal for these students upon their dismissal from the MSSLC or graduation from the MISD?
- 10) How would you change any aspect of your job or the educational programs currently in place by the MISD for the DDD students to better serve their individual needs?
- 11) What are the challenges you face with the students classified as DDD?
- 12) What strengths do you see that these students have, if any?
- 13) What are the students' challenges?

**APPENDIX D**  
**CLASSROOM OBSERVATION FORM**

Teacher:

Date:

	Present	Needed
Positive learning atmosphere		
Students engaged cognitively		
Teacher using good proximity		
TEKS/TAKS aligned		
Evidence of Individualized instruction		
Objective visibly posted		
Use of technology		

I want to commend you  
for:

I want to bring to your attention:

By:

**APPENDIX E**

**CLASSROOM OBSERVATION FORM**

Teacher: Mrs. Andrews

Date: 3/22/12

	Present	Needed
Positive learning atmosphere	X	
Students engaged cognitively	X	
Teacher using good proximity	X	
TEKS/TAKS aligned		X
Evidence of Individualized instruction	X	
Objective visibly posted	X	
Use of technology		X

I want to commend you for:

- Working closely with the students.
- Allowing students to move ahead.
- Handling student who wanted attention very well.
- Positive encouragement “do your best”
- Expectations – “I expect you all to know...”

I want to bring to your attention:

- Look for ways to get your aide more involved. During the time I was sitting there, she was just sitting at her desk. She can be a valuable asset if used appropriately.

By: RL

## APPENDIX F

### CLASSROOM OBSERVATION FORM

Teacher: Mrs. Goodman

Date: 3/22/12

	Present	Needed
Positive learning atmosphere		X
Students engaged cognitively		X
Teacher using good proximity		X
TEKS/TAKS aligned	X	
Evidence of Individualized instruction	X	
Objective visibly posted		X
Use of technology		X

I want to commend you for:

- Organizing concepts
- Positive redirection of behavior
- Class discussion

I want to bring to your attention:

- Why is your aide running your classroom? During the time I was there, she was covering key vocabulary and notes. This should be time you spend with your students to make sure they receive the appropriate instruction.
- You were honest and said you do not feel really prepared because you were just coming off spring break. However, it is Friday. One

would think you would be caught up and prepared by now. In your opinion, what is preventing your preparation?

- Phone rang during instruction four times. Calls were not instructionally related???
- Your comment: Your placement is not your IEP. This concerns me. A student's current placement is part of his/her Individual Education Plan (IEP)???

By: RL